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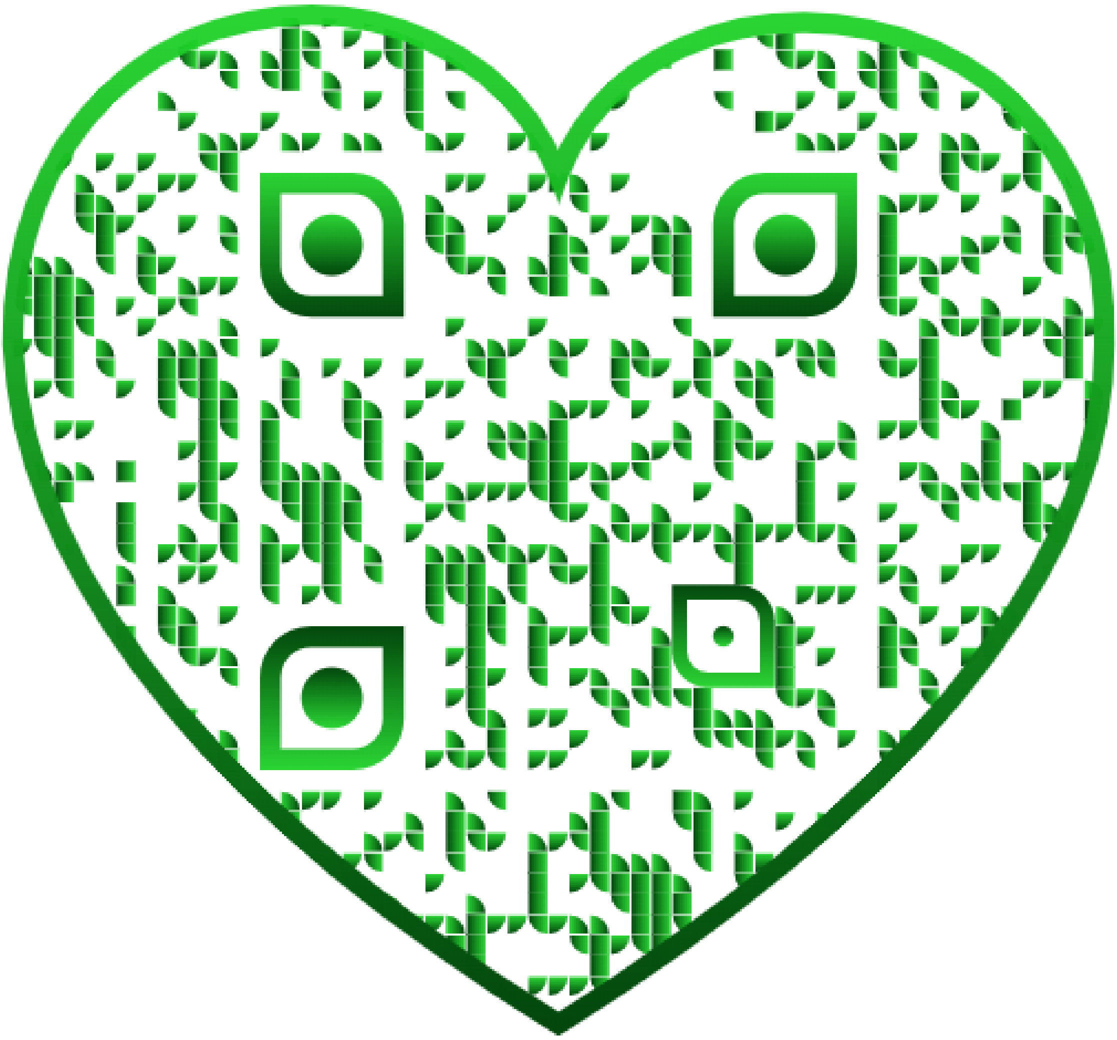

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THE ROOT NOTE

I now have some sympathy with the musicians we interview in these pages as I feel I am currently writing my 'difficult second leader'. I've been told the problem comes because you have a lifetime to write your first leader, and a much shorter time to produce the second. But thankfully we've filled these pages with enough incredible gear and worthy artists to provide me with plenty of inspiration.

Let's start with our cover artist, Passenger. Mike Rosenberg is a man who, by his own admission, can walk through the street relatively untroubled despite the fact that he has a platinum album to his name and his most popular single, 'Let Her Go', has racked up well over a billion views on YouTube. So aside from his humility in the face of being thrust into stardom, I was surprised to learn that Mike frequently hits the street to busk, reasoning that it keeps his playing and singing in good order, allows him to gauge feedback on his songs and rewards those fans who follow him around the world. As he puts it: "It gives everyone a free gig, which can't be a bad thing."

My experience of busking is slightly different, however. While waiting for our rehearsal space to open, my bandmate and I took to the street to regale the passing shoppers with a couple of original tunes. We only managed to get halfway through our first song when an elderly gent threw a pound in my gigbag and asked politely if we could stop playing. There are a world of benefits to being out there, though. And it is a viable tool for sharpening up your performance skills – though there are some legal loopholes to jump through before you are able to legally perform in a public place. We'd be interested in hearing your busking stories (good or bad) – drop them to the email address on the panel to the side and we may print the best ones.

It's a positive period for acoustic music in all genres – just check our bulging CD reviews pages for proof. This Wild Life will have released their new album as you read this. Here's a band I heard about thanks to my neverending fascination with – and love of – pop-punk music. An early EP of theirs was a slice of joyous punk with a side of acoustic tracks, but then the band emerged with an entirely acoustic album and just two members. Now, about to release their second album on Epitaph, the band is still sharing stages with some of the biggest names in the hardcore and punk scene, but are keeping crowds more used to moshing and crowdsurfing captivated with two acoustic guitars, some tight harmonies and the ability to wrench every last drop of emotion out of 12 strings. I got to speak to Kevin Jordan about how he gets the rock kids moving with just his Taylor guitar.

We've also got some special bits of gear up for review, including two models from the cabal of the European Guitar Builders who will have, by the time you read this, exhibited at the London Acoustic Show. Ralph Bonte of Arrenbie and A.J. Lucas can certainly make special guitars – and I know both Joel and Ollie who reviewed them for us were smitten with the models they had to play with.

Thanks to the vagaries of our publishing schedule, the show is still a few days away, but I am preparing myself to take in the sights and, more importantly, sounds of the weekend. The main stage, masterclass room and Acoustic Café are stacked with talent and I'm expecting to come away inspired for the next 12 months. Hopefully your post-show enthusiasm hasn't waned yet, but if you are stuck for a reason to pick up your guitar, turn to the tuition section where our crack team will put you through your paces. Thomas Leeb's introduction to one-handed harmonics will add a new tool to your sonic arsenal, while Daniel Ho's series on arranging in slack key tuning has been a real eye-opener for me.

Finally, thanks to those of you who took the time to get in touch after the last issue. I read all your letters and emails closely and am delighted to see that so many of you are invested in making sure that it continues to be the premier magazine for acoustic players and music.

Enjoy the issue.
Nick Robbins

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DOYLE DYKES TOURS UK

© Richard Ecclestone

Doyle Dykes is embarking on a four-date tour of the UK, in association with guitarguitar. He will be playing songs from his vast repertoire of styles, and showcasing various Godin, Seagull and Simon and Patrick guitars.

Dykes is a renowned fingerpicker, who draws influence from Chet Atkins, Duane Eddy and the Beatles. He has developed a distinct, recognisable sound that amazes audiences with skill while capturing hearts with sincerity and soul – something those who saw him at the London Acoustic Show in 2015 can attest to.

Andy Haldane of guitarguitar said: "We were over the moon to be offered the opportunity to have Doyle Dykes perform at four locations, in association with guitarguitar. It's an opportunity for many of our customers – and staff – to see the genius of Doyle Dykes at work."

Dates:
Mon 3 Oct – Maggie Mays, Glasgow (19.30)
Tue 4 Oct – Voodoo Rooms, Edinburgh (19.30)
Wed 5 Oct – Mercure Hotel, Newcastle (19.30)
Thu 6 Oct – guitarguitar, Epsom (19.00)
Tickets cost £5 and can be bought from guitarguitar (www.guitarguitar.co.uk).

THE LIFECYCLE OF A MARTIN

Martin Guitar is doing its bit to raise awareness of the importance of sustainable wood sourcing by teaming up with the Rainforest Alliance on the #FollowTheFrog campaign.

Social media followers will get the chance to witness the 'life journey' of a Martin guitar, as the company chronicle its beginnings from a lump of sustainably sourced wood, to a finished product, receiving the Rainforest Alliance Certified seal along the way.

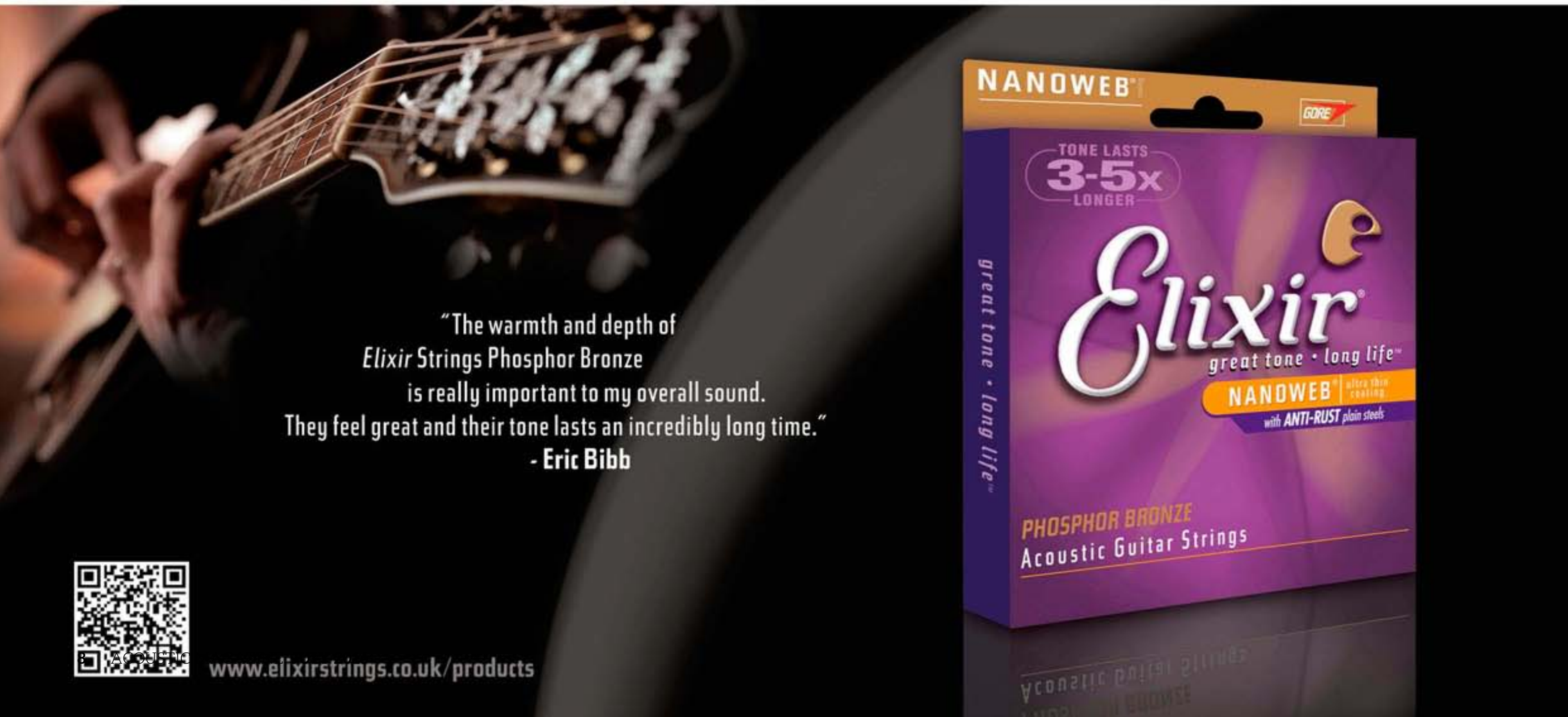
Nigel Sizer, president of the Rainforest Alliance, said: "The Martin Guitar #FollowTheFrog campaign is a wonderful way for people to get an inside look at what it really means to source wood responsibly, in a way that helps people and the planet. With the global challenges of climate change and deforestation we currently face, sustainable wood sourcing has never been more important."

Info: www.martinguitar.com/followthefrog

A CHRISTMAS CARROLL

Guitar maestro and *Acoustic* contributor Clive Carroll has played in some of the world's most celebrated venues with artists like John Renbourn, Gordon Giltrap, John Etheridge and Tommy Emmanuel. However on 2 December, fans will have the unique opportunity to attend an intimate gig by the guitarist at Mycenae House, London, ahead of his slightly less intimate performance at the Royal Festival Hall with Tommy Emmanuel next year.

Fri 2 Dec, 2016 – Mycenae House, Blackheath, London (19.15).
Tickets available from: www.wegottickets.com/event/362539



GOING FOR A SONG

The national charity Youth Music has thanked Faith Guitars after the UK guitar brand donated a signed Venus guitar to the cause.

The guitar will be auctioned to raise funds for Youth Music, who work with young people living with disability, poverty, mental health issues or in care.

Performers at this year's Cambridge Folk festival lined up to add their autograph to the guitar, with signatories including Mary Chapin Carpenter, Eliza Carthy & The Wayward Band, Lady Maisery, Sam Kelly & The Lost Boys and Blazin' Fiddles.

Matt Griffiths, CEO of Youth Music, said: "We really appreciate the support of the music industry and are especially grateful to Faith Guitars for donating this lovely instrument. It's now set to become a wonderful collector's item with so many great artists autographing it."

Youth Music's major fundraising initiative is Give a Gig, which invites bands of all genres to put on a gig, or donate some of the proceeds of a gig, to support Youth Music's work. ***www.giveagig.org.uk.***

TAYLOR MADE FOR YOU

Grammy-nominated guitarist Martin Taylor will celebrate his 60th birthday this year with a series of solo UK concerts.

Widely considered the world's foremost solo jazz and fingerstyle guitar exponent, Taylor has been honoured with an MBE and two honourary doctorates over the course of his career and collaborated with musicians including Jeff Beck, Tommy Emmanuel and Bill Wyman to name a few.

Dates:
Fri 14 Oct – Fareham Ashcroft Arts Centre
Sat 15 Oct – New Milton Forest Arts Centre
Tues 18 Oct – Colchester Arts Centre
Weds 19 Oct – G Live, Guildford
Fri 21 Oct – Musicport Festival, Whitby
Tues 25 Oct – The Stables, Milton Keynes
Thurs 27 Oct – Band On The Wall, Manchester
Fri 28 Oct – Indigo O2, London
Mon 31 Oct – Uppingham School, Uppingham
Tues 1 Nov – Brindley Theatre, Runcorn
Weds 2 Nov – Loughborough University Arts, Loughborough
Thurs 4 Nov – Gardyne Theatre, Dundee
Fri 5 Nov – Spectrum Centre, Inverness
Tickets are available from www.martintaylor.com/tour

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13022 - Atkin OO Am Special Parlour Guitar
15214 - Breedlove Discovery Concert
14197 - Breedlove Discovery Concert Lefthanded
13367 - Brook Lyn 12 Fret Handmade Guitar
13189 - Brook Tamar Medium Jumbo Handmade
13188 - Brook Taw OM Size Handmade Guitar
4612 - Dave King Katrina OOO Model, Sunburst
15612 - Dobro USA, Square Neck, Wooden Resonator
0000 - EKO - 4 Models in Stock Now
15233 - Faith FKN Naked Neptune Acoustic Guitar
14718 - Faith FMSB45 BNC Classic Burst Mercury
12331 - Faith FRMG Mars Drop Shoulder Dread.
14715 - Faith FRSB45 Drop Dreadnought
6975 - Fender CD60, Black
5096 - Fender CD60, Natural
5079 - Fender CD60, Sunburst
15501 - Fender CF60 Folk
10192 - Fender CP100 Parlour Guitar
15197 - Fender PM1 Standard Dreadnought, Natural
15500 - Fender Sonoran 3/4 Mini Acoustic Guitar
14304 - Fender Starcaster Acoustic Guitar Pack
15419 - Gibson Hummingbird, Cherry Burst, C.1974
7090 - K Yairi New Yorker NY0021B, Natural
13614 - K Yairi YT1 Acoustic Guitar
12652 - Lakewood D14 Dreadnought Acoustic Guitar
12649 - Lakewood M14 Grand Concert
13386 - Landola D85 Dreadnought Acoustic, Used
14127 - Luna Vista Mustang Electro Acoustic
15310 - Martin 00015M Mahogany Acoustic, Used
15590 - Martin 00017 Whiskey Sunset Acoustic Guitar
13064 - Martin D18 Dreadnought, Secondhand
15473 - Martin D28 Dreadnought, Natural
5702 - Martin D28 Dreadnought, Natural
6008 - Martin D35 Dreadnought, Natural
5013 - Martin D41 Dreadnought, Natural
7115 - Martin LX1 Little Martin
6007 - Martin OM21 Orchesta, Natural
13824 - Martin 00028EC Eric Clapton, Natural
15258 - Rainsong NP12 Nylon Parlour Guitar
11149 - Seagull Excursion Natural Folk SG
11148 - Seagull Excursion Natural Grand SG
11162 - Seagull Maritime SWS Mahogany High-Gloss
10230 - Seagull S6 Original
9601 - Tanglewood MAV Nashville Folk Acoustic
13291 - Tanglewood TPEFLS
9570 - Tanglewood TW40 DAN Dreadnought
15490 - Tanglewood TW40OD Sundance Delta Orch.
15491 - Tanglewood TW40PD Sundance Delta Parlour
14943 - Tanglewood TW40 SD VS
15489 - Tanglewood TW40 SDD Sundance Delta
13081 - Vintage V2000MGG Acoustic Guitar
13269 - Vintage V400CSB, Cherry Sunburst
10929 - Vintage VE2000DLX Gordon Giltrap
14397 - Vintage VE8000PB Paul Brett 6-String
13272 - Vintage VJ100N XL Jumbo Series, Natural
12437 - Yairi - 2 Models in Stock Now
6964 - Yamaha FG700S Acoustic Guitar
13387 - Yamaha FG720S Yamaha FG720S
14483 - Yamaha FS720S Acoustic, Black
15577 - Yamaha LL26 Handcrafted Jumbo Acoustic
15579 - Yamaha LL36
15578 - Yamaha LL56 Custom ARE
15576 - Yamaha LS26 A.R.E. II Handcrafted Guitar

6 String Electro Acoustics

10918 - Breedlove USA Gold D/SRE
13866 - Breedlove Discovery Concert CE, Sunburst
14690 - Breedlove Focus Special Edition Redwood
15224 - Breedlove Pursuit Concert Acoustic
14689 - Breedlove Revival DR Deluxe
14688 - Breedlove Voice Auditorium Small Jumbo
14686 - Breedlove Voice Concert Myrtle
14630 - Breedlove Voice Revival 000/SMe
10068 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Cherry
4769 - EKO Ranger EQ Vintage Series, Black
12358 - Faith FKV Venus Concert Cutaway/Electro
14717 - Faith FVHG Venus Cut/Electro Acoustic
15344 - Faith Nomad Mini Neptune
15345 - Faith Nomad Mini Saturn
14730 - Fender CD100CE Left-Handed Cutaway
6943 - Fender CD60CE, Electro, Black
7024 - Fender CD60CE, Dreadnought, Electro, Nat
4335 - Fender CD60CE Dreadnought Elec, Sunburst
10320 - Fender CD60CE Mahogany Electro Acoustic
15523 - Fender CF60CE Folk-Size Cutaway Electro
14732 - Fender CJ290SCE Jumbo Maple With Case
15280 - Fender PM1 Deluxe, Vintage Sunburst
15355 - Fender PM3 Dlx Triple-0 Vintage Sunburst
15573 - Fender San Miguel Acoustic, Secondhand
14744 - Fender Sonoran SCE Left-hand Dreadnought
15525 - Fender Sonoran SCE, Candy Apple Red
9700 - Gibson J45 Custom Electro Acoustic
15380 - Gibson Songwriter Deluxe, Secondhand
15600 - Jimmy Moon 0003 Acoustic, Secondhand
8091 - Jimmy Moon 0003CE Electro Acoustic

6 String Electro Acoustics

4555 - Jimmy Moon Bryan Adams Signature
9552 - LAG T300AE Electro Acoustic Guitar
12672 - Lakewood J14CP Jumbo Electro
12658 - Lakewood M14 CP
14129 - Luna Heartsong Series Parlor Electro
14130 - Luna Henna Oasis Steel String Electro
14471 - Luna Vista Eagle Electro Acoustic Guitar
14128 - Luna Vista Wolf Electro Acoustic Guitar
13717 - Maestro Raffles AB-CSB A Guitar
13714 - Maestro Raffles FM-CSB A Custom Jumbo
12696 - Maestro Raffles Flame Maple Cust Electro
12702 - Maestro Raffles IR-CSB R Small Jumbo Electro
12790 - Maestro Raffles MDT Small Jumbo Electro
12789 - Maestro Raffles Monkey Pod Electro
13713 - Maestro Raffles MR-CSB A Custom Jumbo
14817 - Maestro Raffles MR-CSB-A Fanned Frets
12792 - Maestro Rosetta MDT Dreadnought Electro
12793 - Maestro Rosetta MRDT Dreadnought Electro
13212 - Maestro Singa Flame Maple Custom Electro
14814 - Maestro Singa M-CSB-C All Solid MedJumbo
13712 - Maestro Singa MR-CSB A Custom Jumbo
13209 - Maestro Singa MRDT Medium Jumbo Electro
13711 - Maestro Singa O-CSB Custom Medium Jumbo
14815 - Maestro Singa WE-CSB-A Medium Jumbo
13718 - Maestro Victoria with fitted LR Baggs
13207 - Maestro Victoria with fitted LR Baggs
12225 - Martin & Co 000X1AE Electro Acoustic
15474 - Martin & Co DXAE Electro Acoustic
14479 - Martin 000RSGT Electro Acoustic Guitar
15592 - Martin 0015E Retro Non-Cutaway Electro
8277 - Martin DC15ME Dreadnought Cutaway
15487 - Martin DCPA4 Electro Acoustic, Shaded
14780 - Martin DJR Dreadnought Junior
14477 - Martin DRS2 Electro Acoustic Guitar
14478 - Martin DRSGT Electro Acoustic Guitar
15591 - Martin GPC18E Electro Acoustic Guitar
15486 - Martin GPCPA4 Electro Acoustic Shaded
14528 - Martin HD28 with Fishman, Secondhand,
13674 - Martin OMXAE Electro Acoustic, Black
12439 - Northwood Custom Koa 80D Electro
12438 - Northwood Custom Myrtle 80 Series D-nought
15548 - Ovation 1771 AX Standard Balladeer, CBB
0000 - PJ Eggle - 5 Models in Stock Now
10095 - RainSong BI-JM1000N2 Graphite Guitar
10094 - RainSong BI-OM1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
10038 - RainSong BI-WS1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
9821 - Rainsong CO-JM1000N2
9819 - Rainsong CO-OM1000N2
9818 - Rainsong CO-WS1000N2
9815 - Rainsong JM1000 Graphite Guitar
4812 - RainSong OM1000N2 Electro Acousti
10082 - RainSong P12 Parlor
10088 - RainSong P14 Parlor
9824 - Rainsong S-DR1000N2 Dreadnought Studio
9827 - RainSong SG Shorty Gloss Shorty Series
7974 - Rainsong WS1000N2 Graphite Guitar
15259 - Rainsong SMCX Smokey Series
15257 - Rainsong SMH Smokey Hybrid
5257 - Satori YD18EQ, Dreadnought Electro, Nat
8234 - Satori YD42EQ Electro Acoustic, Vint Nat
5255 - Satori YO28HEQ, OM Electro, Natural
0000 - Takamine - 6 Models in Stock Now
15481 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR D E
15494 - Tanglewood DBT SFCE PW
15492 - Tanglewood Discovery DBT SFCE BW
13295 - Tanglewood TPESFCEZS Electro Acoustic
14952 - Tanglewood TSF CE Black
14950 - Tanglewood Evolution IV TSF CE Red
14954 - Tanglewood EvolutionTSFCE Sunburst Gloss
14951 - Tanglewood TSF CE White
15583 - Tanglewood TW4 Winterleaf Super Folk BK
15584 - Tanglewood TW4 Winterleaf Super Folk BR
15581 - Tanglewood TW4 Winterleaf Super Folk WH
15582 - Tanglewood TW4 Winterleaf Super Folk CE
4187 - Tanglewood TW40 OANE Orchestra
15498 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, Black
15497 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, Burgandy
15495 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, Whiskey Gloss
15496 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, White
14947 - Tanglewood TWCR O Crossroads
15544 - Taylor 214CE Electro Acoustic, Used
13485 - Taylor 515CE Electro Acoustic, Used
14419 - Vintage Pilgrim VPG900 Mayflower Deluxe
8007 - Vintage Gordon Giltrap Signature
13399 - Vintage VECJ100 Jumbo Acoustic Black
13233 - Yamaha AC3M Electro Acoustic, Secondhand
14427 - Yamaha APX1000 Slimline Guitar, Natural
14492 - Yamaha CPX1000 Electro Acoustic, Natural
6961 - Yamaha CPX700 Electro Acoustic Sandburst
15575 - Yamaha FGX720SC, Black
14422 - Yamaha FGX720SC, Natural
14421 - Yamaha FJX720SC Electro, Sunburst
15574 - Yamaha FJX730SC, Brown Sunburst
15568 - Yamaha FSX720SC II Brown Sunburst
8142 - Yamaha FSX730SC, Brown Sunburst
14420 - Yamaha FX310A Guitar, Natural
6966 - Yamaha FX370C Dreadnought Electro, Black
6965 - Yamaha FX370C Electro Acoustic, Natural
14522 - Yamaha SLG200S Silent Guitar, Steel

Classical Guitars

0000 - Admira - 6 Models in Stock Now
8590 - Azahar Model 31A Classical Guitar
15546 - David Pelter Handmade Classical Guitar
15547 - David Pelter Handmade Classical Guitar
15585 - Manuel Rodriguez C3 Classical Guitar, S/h
8507 - Mendieta Conservatoire C Classical
5360 - Ramirez 130 Year Aniversary Classical
6029 - Ramirez 1NE Classical Guitar
15239 - Ramirez 2NCWE Classical Guitar
15236 - Ramirez 4NE Classical Guitar
5644 - Ramirez George Harrison Model Classical
6336 - Ramirez R2 Classical Guitar
15237 - Ramirez RA Classical Guitar
15238 - Ramirez RB Classical Guitar
6027 - Ramirez S1 Classical Guitar
12761 - Ramirez SP Classical Guitar
6441 - Roberto C2 Classical Guitar
10999 - Westcoast Student 4/4 Classical, Red
14720 - Yamaha C40II Full Size Classical Guitar
14721 - Yamaha CX40 Mark II Electro-Classical

12 Strings

13865 - Breedlove Pursuit 12 String Acoustic
13553 - Eko Vintage Ranger 12 in Black
14525 - Guild JF230-AB USA-Made, c1997
10991 - Tanglewood TRD12 Lefty 12 , Nat
15479 - Tanglewood TW145 12 SS CE
14398 - Vintage VE2000GG12 Giltrap 12-String
14349 - Vintage VE8000PB-12 Paul Brett

Mandolin Family

8826 - Ashbury AM-325 Octave Mandola
15437 - Ashbury Celtic Octave Mandola
15442 - Ashbury Rathlin Irish Bouzouki
13527 - Blue Moon BB15 Bouzouki GR33001
15435 - Blue Moon Irish Bouzouki, Pear Shape
14028 - Breedlove Crossover OO O Hole Mandolin,
14500 - Breedlove Crossover Mandolin, VV
12540 - Fender FM63SE Electro Acoustic Mandolin
12568 - Fender Concert Tone "F" 63S Mandolin
14741 - Fender Concert Tone Mandolin "A" 53S
15532 - Fender Concert Tone Mandolin Pack
9240 - Jimmy Moon A2 Acoustic Mandolin, Natural
15598 - Jimmy Moon A2 Acoustic Mandolin, Natural
4564 - Jimmy Moon Bouzouki, Nat
4553 - Jimmy Moon Standard Mandolin
15599 - Jimmy Moon Standard Mandolin, K&K Pickup
9430 - Ozark Flat Back Bouzouki
8315 - Westcoast M20 Mandolin Sunburst
12347 - Westcoast M20S Mandolin Sunburst

Acoustic Amplification

0000 - AER - 10 Models in Stock
13905 - Blackstar ID Core BEAM Bluetooth Amp
10496 - Fender Acoustasonic 15 Acoustic Amp
8166 - Fender Acoustasonic 150 Acoustic Combo
9166 - Loudbox Artist
4548 - Fishman Loudbox Mini - 60W, 1x6.5"
5286 - Fishman SA220 - 220w, 6x4"
13282 - Markbass AC101 Acoustic Combo
6770 - Marshall AS100D - 50W+50W, 2x8"
13956 - Marshall AS50D - 50W, 2x8"
15059 - Marshall AS50D RED - 50W, 2x8"
4976 - Roland AC33 30W - 1x5"
9358 - Roland AC33, Rosewood
11129 - Roland AC40 Acoustic Guitar Amplifier
6505 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Amp - 30w, 2x6.5
9383 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Guitar Combo, RW
5597 - Roland AC90 - 90W, 2x8"
5574 - Roland Cube Street 2.5+2.5W, 6.5
14371 - MOBILE AC Acoustic Chorus, Portable Amp
13018 - Tanglewood T3 30W Acoustic Amplifier
8108 - Tanglewood T6, 60W
14941 - Tanglewood TBA5 5 Watt Acoustic Amp
13471 - Tanglewood TXS Bass Sub
10937 - Yamaha THR5A Acoustic Amp

Ukuleles

12564 - Barnes & Mullins BJ306 6-String Banjo
4371 - Barnes & Mullins UBJ1 Banjo Ukulele
0000 - Baton Rouge - 11 Models in Stock Now
15147 - Blue Moon Tenor Ukulele Pear-Shaped
15398 - Deering Goodtime Tenor Banjo Ukulele
14557 - Deering Goodtime Ukulele Banjo
12420 - Fender '52 Tele Shaped Ukulele
9081 - Fender Mino' Aka Concert Ukulele
5310 - Fender Nohea Tenor Ukulele
13616 - Fender Piha'ea Soprano Ukulele
12800 - Kala KA-BNJ/BK-C Concert Banjo Ukulele
9345 - Kala U Bass Electro Ac In Solid Mahogany
8127 - Kala U Bass in Mahogany
4722 - Kala U-Bass 2 Electro Acoustic Ukulele
15597 - Kohala Polycarbonate Concert Uke Electro
15595 - Kohala Polycarbonate Concert Ukulele
15596 - Kohala Polycarbonate Soprano Ukulele
13978 - Laka Concert Ukulele with GigBag
13979 - Laka Soprano Ukulele with Case
10372 - Magic Fluke M10 Concert Ukulele, Natural
13883 - Magic Fluke M30 Flea Sop Uke, Mahogany
12224 - Martin & Co C1K Koa Concert Ukulele
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9050 - Ohana CK20CE Concert Uke
8513 - Ohana CK50MG Concert Ukulele
8508 - Ohana PK10S Soprano Ukulele Pineapple
8516 - Ohana PK25G Soprano Ukulele Pineapple
13636 - Ohana SK10YW Soprano Uke, Matte Yellow
13644 - Ohana SK12 Soprano Ukulele
4711 - Ohana SK20S Soprano Ukulele Uke
14210 - Ohana SK21M Premium Mahogany Sop
13626 - Ohana SK22 Soprano Ukulele
8517 - Ohana SK22Z Sop Ukulele Zebrawood B&S
13642 - Ohana SK23 Soprano Ukulele
4710 - Ohana SK25 Soprano Ukulele
14211 - Ohana SK70BA Spruce & Black Applewood
14508 - Ohana SK70L Soprano Ukulele
14212 - Ohana SK70WG Soprano Uke, Willow B & S
12390 - Ohana Soprano Uke Gig Bag
13311 - Ohana Concert Uke Gig Bag
13312 - Ohana Tenor Uke Gig Bag
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12740 - ResoVille Weeki Wachee Resonator Ukulele
10384 - Risa Electric Soprano Ukulele, UKS363MP
10385 - Risa UKS385MP Solid Concert Electro Uke
15476 - Risa Tenor Ukulele Electric Tenor-Uke
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13550 - Eko Mini Evo EQ Travel Guitar In Natural
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15345 - Faith Nomad Mini Saturn
15500 - Fender Sonoran 3/4 Mini Acoustic Guitar
14473 - Luna Safari Henna 3/4 Size Travel Guitar
14472 - Luna Safari Starry Night 3/4 Travel Guitar
15432 - Luna Safari Tattoo
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10497 - Martin LX Red Little Martin
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7320 - Martin LX1E, Electro Travel Guitar
15439 - Martin LXK2 Little Martin Travel Guitar
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14628 - Tanglewood TWJLJ, Travel Guitar
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7122 - Gitane D500 Gypsy Jazz, Natural GR52066
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ASK THE EXPERTS

USING AN AGENT FOR BOOKING LIVE GIGS? THE MUSICIANS' UNION IS HERE TO MAKE SURE YOU'RE GETTING A FAIR DEAL

In the music industry, an agent is generally someone who secures live work for musicians. Although agencies are commonly referred to as agents, they may operate in one of two ways – as an employment agency or an employment business. In each case, you need to know what to keep an eye out for so that you can protect your rights and potentially secure the best live opportunities for your act.

If your agent is acting an employment agency, the agent will arrange gig contracts between the hirer – usually the venue owner or promoter – and the musicians, and charge a commission on the gig fee under a separate agency contract with the musician or the hirer.

The agent cannot be agent for both the musician and the hirer and should make it clear to you who he/she is actually the agent for.
If acting as an employment agent, the agent's terms must include:

■ Details of the services to be provided.
■ Whether the agent is entitled to sign contracts on your behalf.
■ Whether the agent is entitled to receive money on your behalf.
■ Details of the fee payable and how it is calculated – this may be a guaranteed amount, a minimum fee, or a deal based wholly or partially on ticket sales/box office revenue.
■ Whether a deposit is payable.
■ Whether refunds are payable and, if so, how and when this would take place.
■ Whether the fee is to be deducted from earnings and, if so, how and when.
■ Whether you are required to give or entitled to receive notice to terminate the agreement and, if so, how much.

An agent acting as an employment business will 'buy' the musicians for a fee under one contract, and then 'sell' them on to a hirer for a higher fee under another separate contract. The difference between the buying and selling price will be the agent's profit.

If acting as an employment business, the agent's terms must include:

■ Whether you will be employed or self-employed and the terms and conditions that will apply.
■ An undertaking to pay you, whether or not the hirer pays them.
■ The length of notice of termination you must give and are entitled to receive.
■ The performance fee, which may be a guaranteed amount, a minimum fee or a deal based wholly or partially on ticket sales/box office revenue.
■ When remuneration will be paid.
■ Any entitlement to holidays or holiday pay.

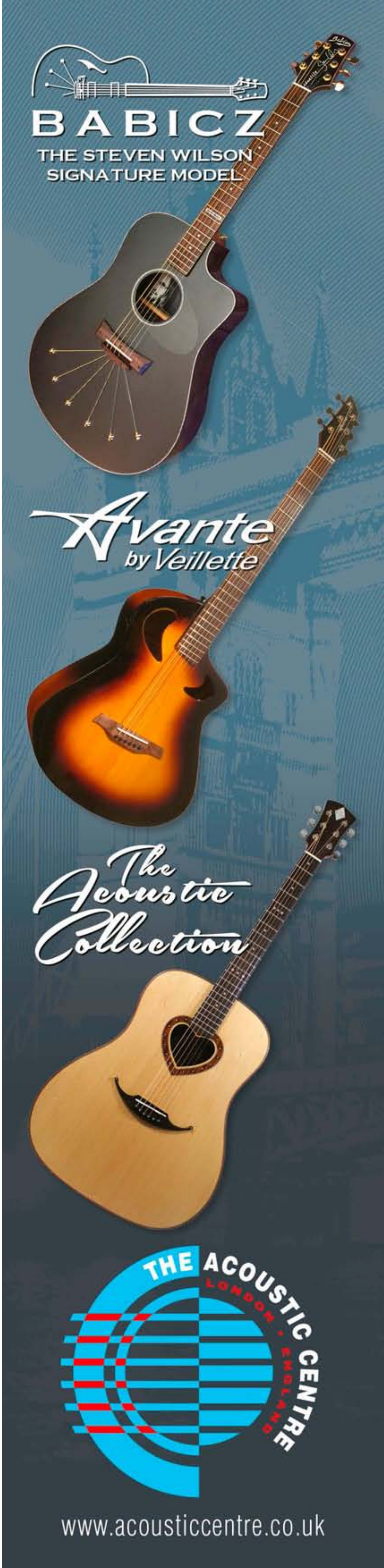
There are some things that you need to think about if you enlist the services of an agency.
Is your agency contract exclusive? It's quite common to have more than one agent. However, some agents will demand to be your sole representative for live work, at home and abroad.

Does your contract require you to pay agency commission for repeat/follow-up bookings? It is worth checking the small print of a contract to see whether the agent will demand commission on your future gigs at the same venue or at other venues booked through the same promoter, even if these are arranged directly between you and the hirer or by some other agent.

Musicians' Union members can get contracts checked by our contract advisory service where a specialist solicitor will take a look to see if it's a fair deal or not. If it's not, we can advise you on how to make it fairer and support you with advice on how to negotiate the deal.

Anyone can set themselves up as an agent, so it's important you know what to look out for and choose wisely.

If you're looking for an agent and want to know more, or have questions about any other aspect of your career, get in touch via **theMU.org**. ■



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SARAH JAROSZ

WORDS: JOEL MCIVER **IMAGES:** SCOTT SIMONTACCHI

Texan singer-songwriter Sarah Jarosz returns with a fourth album of uncommon depth. Joel McIver asks how she does it

No truly classy writer would liken a musician's birthplace to their music, because that's cheesy and trite, but it makes perfect sense in the case of 25-year-old singer-songwriter Sarah Jarosz (pronounced 'Jarrows'). Her hometown of Austin, Texas is that rare thing – a bastion of progressive culture in a state not generally known for its forward-thinking approach to life – and her music is similar in that it's based on traditional country, folk and blues but with a definite contemporary edge.

Emotional, sparse and seemingly populated with instrumentation older than Jarosz herself, her new album *Undercurrent* is a powerful set of songs. Her fourth full-length recording since she emerged into the public eye in 2009, the music is at its strongest when it's just the singer and her acoustic instrument, generally a guitar or a mandolin. Asked about her comfort zone as a musician, Jarosz explains: "The way I see it, the new record is anchored around four solo songs, which are all just vocals and guitar. There's a couple of different guitars that I'm playing. One is a little acoustic parlour guitar, and the other is a regular dreadnought. I switched between octave mandolin and clawhammer banjo as well. I also play electric guitar on the last song."

Asked about the make of her instruments, Jarosz – currently on tour around America – laughs: "I'd have to go back to the studio if you want to know what the brands were, for most of them anyway! I borrowed a lot of guitars from my friend John Randall Stewart, who is a really great guitarist and singer based in Nashville. They were all scattered around the studio while we were recording. At any given moment there might have been five guitars standing around the room, and I'd pick them up one by one for recording. I do remember that the parlour guitar which I played on this album was really light, but I'm not sure what make it is. Gary Paczosa, who produced the album, chose it; he found it somewhere. So that one is a bit of a mystery, although I know that the others are either Gibsons or Martins."

Four albums in, Jarosz has come to appreciate the paradox that time spent focused on crafting songs is the resource a successful musician needs most – but also the one they usually lack. She explains: "I'm currently on tour in Charlotte, North Carolina, and I'm about to drive to Virginia. Life on the road keeps me very busy, especially nowadays. The shows on this tour have been really amazing, with lots of sell-outs and amazing crowds, so it's going really well – but I don't have much free time, that's for sure."

Asked if her new album was committed to hard drive with ease, Jarosz reasons: "I'm not sure that 'easy' is the right word, because recording albums is always hard work – but *Undercurrent* is the first album for me that I've written while not also being in high school or college. On this record, I really had the gift of time, and a full schedule to devote to the writing and recording process of the full album. That was an awesome experience, to go to Nashville and just be in the studio and focus on the music. Before that, I was juggling everything at once, which really changed the approach to the songwriting. I was able to be more introspective and dig deeper this time around."

It's been an interesting few years for Jarosz. Economical in her song arrangements and emotive in her lyric-writing, she's received the nod of approval from *Rolling Stone* and beyond. Her first two albums, *Song Up In Her Head* (2009) and *Follow Me Down* (2011) led to acclaim in Texas and elsewhere in the USA, while international notice began to accrue after a third release, 2013's *Build Me Up From Bones*. A 2011 session in Scotland at which Jarosz performed a rendition of Bob Dylan's 'Ring Them Bells' helped spread the word on this side of the pond.

When asked how she became a musician, Jarosz explains that songwriting is virtually in her genes. "I was born in Austin, and we moved to a small town called Wimberley when I was three," she tells us, "but we still went into Austin all the time to see live music, and once I started playing my own songs I performed around Austin too. It's a very special place. My parents were students there back in the hippie era, and it's always been a liberal oasis in the middle of Texas, as a college town and so on."

She continues: "I've been singing my whole life, and when I was about nine years old I became really fascinated by the sound of the mandolin. That became my primary instrument and I became obsessed with it – I was really in love with it! So it's interesting that there's no regular mandolin on the new record, now I come to think of it."

Instead, Jarosz has focused on an octave mandolin this time, an instrument beloved of American country and folk musicians for its sonorous tones, an octave below that of the regular instrument. "I guess the octave mandolin has

almost taken over from the mandolin, in a weird way," she tells *Acoustic*. "I play it exactly the same way as I would the mandolin, but it has a lower, more supportive sound when I'm singing, which I really like."

Her set of influences is wide, she explains, and largely acoustic in nature, too. "Gillian Welch, Nickel Creek and Tim O'Brien were always important to me when I was young. My parents are huge music lovers, so all of the older artists like Neil Young and Crosby, Stills & Nash were big influences on me too. I grew up listening to a lot of the Texas songwriters too, because that's where I grew up: people like Guy Clark and musicians of that type. It's all a part of my musical heritage."

Many readers of this magazine will have studied music independently or at a dedicated institution: scepticism about whether such studies actually help you as a career musician runs deep. Jarosz herself graduated in 2013 from the prestigious New England Conservatory in Boston with a degree in contemporary improvisation. Has it been of use when it comes to establishing a career, we ask?

"It definitely expanded my musical palette," she muses. "It stretched my ear and what I was being exposed to, musically. Before going to that programme I had listened to a lot of different music, but only the usual timeless acoustic stuff, as well as indie-rock bands like Wilco and Paul Simon and Joni Mitchell. At the NEC I was exposed to Abbey Lincoln and Billie Holiday and free improvisation, and it really extended my ear to all the possibilities."

So what is contemporary improvisation? "It's a broad term that includes a lot of different things," explains Jarosz, "but at the end of the day it's about creating your own original sounds through the study of many different musical styles. There's composition, and arranging, and all that stuff. They're all really useful studies."

There you go, folks: education really can help. Jarosz is a singer, multi-instrumentalist, composer, performer and – like just about every musician beyond a certain level – deeply involved in the day-to-day business of being a recording and touring musician. Which of those roles does she see as most crucial, we ask?

"All of those things are important to me," she replies. "I might say that I'm a singer and then a mandolin player, just because those are at the core of my musical identity, but as long as I've been doing this, I've tried to put an emphasis on all of those things that you mentioned, rather than have one be stronger than the others. A lot of my favourite artists do all those things, so my goal is to keep working on them all and make them all better. Why settle for anything less?" ■

***Undercurrent* is out now on Sugar Hill Records. Info: www.sarahjarosz.com.**

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THIS WILD LIFE

WORDS: NICK ROBBINS

Though This Wild Life started out as a punk band, a switch to playing as an acoustic duo brought with it immediate reward. As the duo release second album Low Tides, guitarist and singer Kevin Jordan discusses his band's 'winding route' to success

This Wild Life first emerged from the Californian punk scene in 2010. That incarnation of the band lasted three years, releasing two EPs, before the deck was shuffled and This Wild Life re-emerged as an acoustic duo, with Kevin Jordan and Anthony Del Grosso (previously the drummer) the surviving members of the switch. Jordan and Del Grosso took to YouTube to showcase the new-look TWL – racking up millions of views in the process for a series of acoustic covers of pop-punk and hardcore tunes – before venturing into the studio to record their debut full-length *Clouded* in 2013.

"With *Clouded* we just wanted to make the best record we could," Jordan says, "but at the time we didn't have any touring plans and we weren't signed, so we didn't think about anything other than the album and creating videos to put on YouTube. That was the main goal for that record cycle, which got turned upside down as soon as Epitaph came into the picture."

Epitaph, the independent Hollywood-based label founded by Bad Religion's Brett Gurewitz, snapped up TWL, put out *Clouded* and sent them out on tour – most notably playing the full Warped Tour across the US alongside some of the biggest names in punk.

Now the duo are about to release their second album, *Low Tides*, and their experience of writing *Clouded* had a major influence on the sound of the new record.

"It was a conscious decision going in to make a 'bigger' sounding album," Jordan says. "I think with *Clouded* we had three different visions for the record between me, Anthony and the producer Aaron Marsh. Anthony wanted something really stripped back. More like a Dashboard Confessional kind of sound. Aaron wanted a more full production, with a lot more layers and additional instrumentation. And I wanted something kind of in between. That process was difficult because we had clashing ideas of where we wanted the record to go, but we all ended up really happy with it. With *Low Tides*, Anthony and I had listened to a lot of different music in the years between and had got inspired by some different styles. We went in a lot more open-minded, and not so fearful of musical changes. Throughout the whole process the attitude was to try everything.

> **"The acoustic has been the basis of every song we've written, even if it hasn't been at the forefront"**

"We knew we'd be touring this album for the next few years, so we wanted to put some songs together that had dynamics and gave us the energy to create a live show that had different highs and lows."

Those touring experiences alongside full rock bands also played a part in determining the sound and energy of *Low Tides*.

"We've noticed over the years that we tour mostly with punk and hardcore bands," Jordan says, "so it's cool to stand out and be the soft band on the bill, but we wanted to create songs that had differing tempos and upped the intensity of our show. Obviously the energy that we have in our set isn't the same as the bands we tend to play with, but we wanted to do it in our own way. Some of these songs are bigger and more energetic than anything that we had on *Clouded*."

But how did two guys who were playing in a punk band find their way into an acoustic duo in the first place – especially when both started out their musical lives as drummers.

"We both got to acoustic guitar a little bit later on as we were drummers first. I picked it up because my girlfriend when I was 14 really loved Dashboard Confessional and wanted me to learn a Dashboard song and play it for her. So I got my first guitar, which was an Epiphone, and learned how to play that song.

"Anthony's was similar," Jordan adds. "His mum got him an acoustic guitar and he had to learn how to fingerpick a Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young song for her. So from the start, I was singing and strumming and Anthony was fingerpicking. It's funny that it's so long

from that age and what we learned in the first place, but we've gone full circle and come back to those roles.

"After that we were both playing drums in bands, and both of us ended up playing electric guitar at different points, so then to come back and that's what ends up working for us – what we first did on acoustic guitar – is a weird thing. I never could have guessed that was going to be our path."

Those early forays into the world of Dashboard Confessional opened up Jordan's ears to the crazy world of alternate tunings, which were employed liberally on *Clouded*, but that experimentation was reined in on the new album.

"As cool as alternate tunings are, and as much as I love some of those sounds, over the years of touring we've found that it becomes such a pain in the ass to bounce between these tunings and have different guitars and different set-ups," Jordan says, laughing. "It's really hard to have an arsenal of guitars that can handle all these different set-ups. So on this record I tried to keep it as simple as possible and play in standard and with a capo."

Jordan and Del Grosso are both often playing Taylors in their live videos, and although Del Grosso moved over to the electric dark side to create that fuller sound on some of *Low Tides*' songs, Jordan remained firmly with his Taylor.

"I'm not incredibly particular about what we play, other than how good they sound when they're plugged in," Jordan says. "With our songs, the only time you're going to hear the acoustic guitar is when it's coming through some kind of DI. So we tried a million different guitars, and we just thought that when we A\B-ed them plugged in, Taylor was the best.

"We played the guitars together a lot in the testing process to find ones that worked together. Anthony found that the all-mahogany 324CE was the best for his fingerpicking and that it would cut through without being shrill. The body shape of that is made to resonate more through the mid-range. So if you had a mid-range guitar like that with a spruce top it would be too bright and some of the lead fingerpicking he does would be too thin. So once he had the mahogany body he just settled into that.

He adds: "Taylors tend to be really clear, and they don't tend to be as full or as bassy, but I feel like the low end is something that's easier to pull up in the mixing. If you have a guitar that's really full bodied, it's hard to bring out the detail later, but get the detail to begin with and it's easier to bring in the low end."

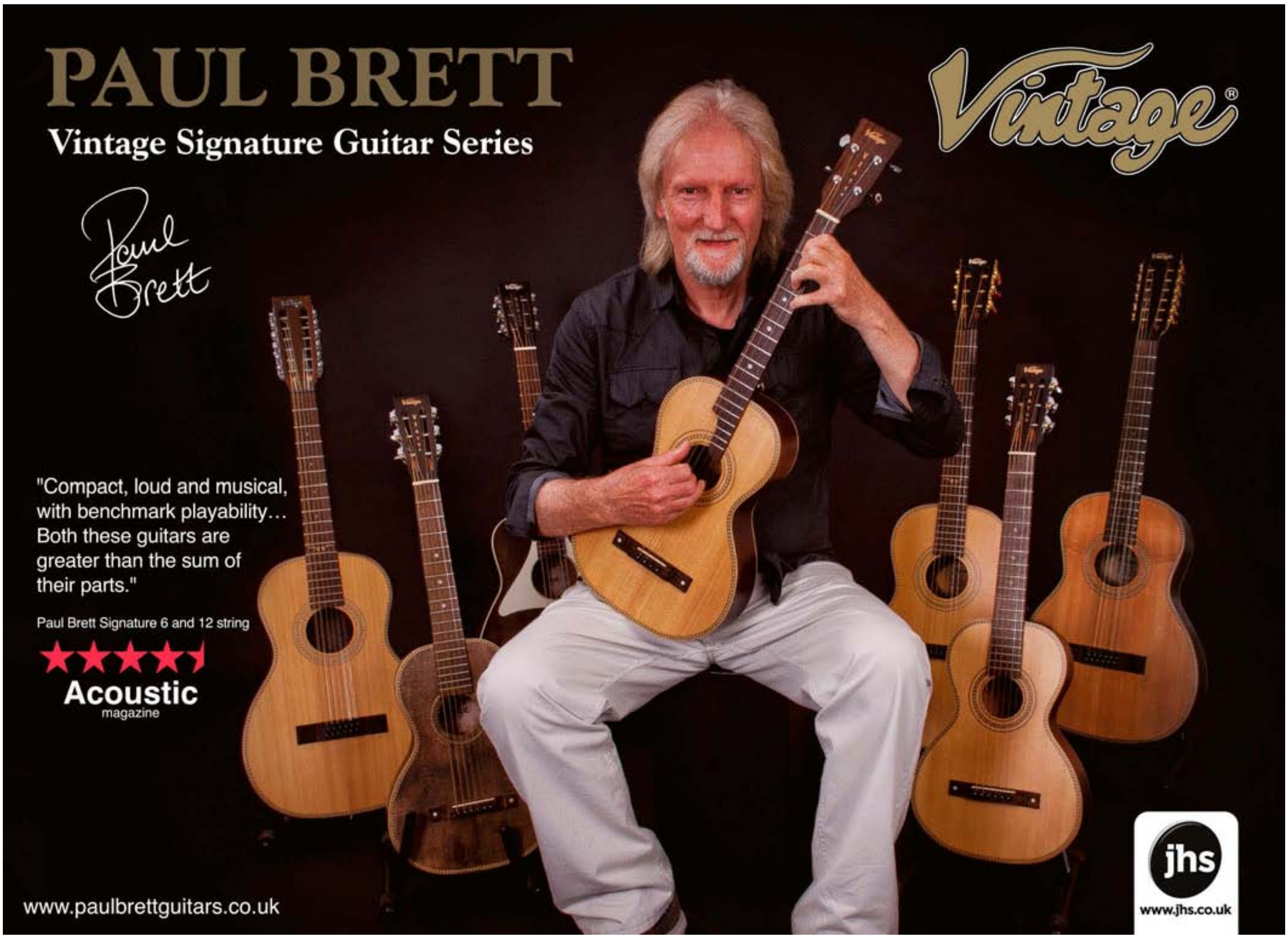
Jordan, who describes himself as "definitely more of a melody writer than a guitarist", also doesn't subscribe to the usual list of influences that appear in this magazine.

"This Wild Life are not inspired in any way by Bob Dylan or Johnny Cash, or anything like that. It's probably obvious to some people that I've never listened to folk music in my life," he says. "I grew up on metal and punk and almost everything else in between. I really love sad, darker songs, and I think that the palette for those kind of songs that's best for my voice is the softer instrumentation: acoustic guitar, piano and strings.

"We definitely come from a punk background," he adds, "and it's not something that we shy away from. We've changed, but we never try and hide away from our old music, which is all still available online. We're proud of the winding route that we've taken to get to where we are today."

That 'winding route' – from punk band, to producing successful YouTube videos, to gearing up to embark on a major tour of the US and the UK and mainland Europe – has never seen Jordan move too far away from the acoustic guitar, however.

"The acoustic guitar has been the basis of every This Wild Life song that we've written, even if it hasn't been at the forefront. It's the thing that's always there and it's what people identify our sound with. Even on the songs that sound a little more full band, they've started on an acoustic, and that's the basis for whatever they turned into. The acoustic has always been the anchor on all our records." ■



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PASSENGER

WORDS: TOM VOCE **IMAGES:** GEORGE FAIRBAIRN

Mike Rosenberg – better known to billions as Passenger – is about to release his new album, but he's not concerned about hitting the top of the charts again, he just wants to busk around the world and continue to be barely recognised as he walks down the street...

Let's put something into perspective before we talk about Mike Rosenberg (AKA Passenger) and his new album *Young as the Morning Old as the Sea*. There are just over a billion kilometres to Saturn and if you wanted to drive your car there it would take about 1500 years. There are just over a billion Roman Catholics in the world – that's nearly all of Central and South America and most of southern Europe. The ubiquitous Microsoft Office is used by just over a billion people. Probably you. One Billion. Thinking of each individual unit that makes up just over a billion is too painful to your noggin, but that astonishing number is the amount of people who have now watched Passenger's 'Let Her Go' video on YouTube.

"It's ridiculous! When it first started getting big I kinda walked around with my mouth open for three or four months in disbelief; after busking for five years to having this song that was kind of dominoing around the world and being number one in all these countries."

But far from being a novelty merchant like Psy who got over a billion views by styling the Gangnam way on his invisible horse, or a pop-cheese blockbuster like Bieber or Tay-Tay, 'Let it Go' won its popularity through the universality of the melancholy break-up. "I think that's why 'Let it Go' did so well. It was a personal song to me – it's a break-up song. Everybody has been in that situation." With a kind of 'Don't Know What You've Got Til It's Gone' sentiment, 'Let Her Go' sees Rosenberg miss an ex he's broken up with, and has become probably the go-to link for the dumped of the world to turn to when they want to believe the dumpee is regretting their decision. "All I ever try and do is say something that everyone else is thinking, in a kind of simple and melodic way," is Mike's explanation.

Rosenberg spends months away from his Brighton home to get around to see his legion of fans, many of whom are in the antipodean isles. "I'd spend six months busking in Europe through our summer and then I'd go to Australia for six months. I did that for three or four years. That's the way to live. It got to the stage where I was playing to a thousand people in Sydney then I'd come home to a hundred people in Brighton and it felt a bit rough." But with Passenger's surge of popular interest, the era of small home crowds wasn't going to last long: "There's a venue called the Dome, that's where I'd go to see the bigger bands as a kid, and I'm doing two nights there now. It's kinda like the billion views thing: there are moments that put it into context and I guess it's moments like that where you realise you really have come a long way."

> **"I think I just look like your average hipster, really: skinny jeans, stupid beard. People just leave me alone"**

Passenger's discography and air miles have both undergone a rapid expansion over the last eight years but the common thread throughout Rosenberg's solo career has been his busking. "I didn't have a record label, I didn't know what I was doing – I was 23 or 24. Busking was suddenly this thing that I could do on my own – I didn't need everybody's say so, I didn't have to wait for someone to say yes, I could just take my amp and guitar and some CDs and just go somewhere and play. It's really liberating."

Earning his keep on the street, Passenger would play busking tours of the UK honing his style and stagecraft to attract passing listeners. "It's a bit of a hustle but in a good way. I think once you play in the street, playing most gigs is a little easier because at least people are there on purpose. You start playing enough to earn enough to spend that money on the next trip to Australia or putting up some flyers or whatever. The whole thing grew with busking so it's a really nice way of watching it get bigger slowly and coming up with it."

These days, after eight albums in eight years and busking tours around them, the Passenger itinerary is a little more mixed, featuring a North America tour that takes in folk festivals and small headline shows plus the familiar TV and radio promo slots... alongside busking, of course. "I get to play every day which is kind of why I started. It

keeps my creative side really happy. It also gives everyone a free gig, which can't be a bad thing, and it's a nice way to say thank you to people who've been following my stuff. And of course I get to tell them about the new record coming out and the gigs coming up. It just feels like a really natural and lovely way to keep everybody in the loop."

The new record is *Young As The Morning Old As The Sea*, with its songs illustrating the kind of personal stories of longing and pathos that Passenger has become known for, but which this time around become weaved into a love-letter to landscapes. "I cottoned on to the fact fairly early on that there was this landscape theme going on. Recording the album in New Zealand and filming in Iceland – they're two of the most epic and beautiful places I've ever been."

Rosenberg chose Neil Finn's Roundhead studio in Auckland after recording the last three at another studio in Sydney. "I think you get an immediate feel for a studio as soon as you walk in, or you don't. I've been in many brilliant top studios that feel a bit clinical and odd and not the most inspiring places. Neil's is so obviously built with so much love and care. They've got some beautiful old analogue gear and some great instruments and it just felt right… also I'm a massive Crowded House fan."

No doubt New Zealand's geological eye-candy helped inspire the lyrical theme and big cinematics of the new album. "Before recording I had two weeks in the South Island just exploring. It's just stunning. Baffling. Really beautiful. It really set the scene and it meant that I went in to record those songs full of that energy." They are songs whose themes will appeal to anyone who's ever lived out of a backpack on their gap year, travelling to far away places and maybe falling in and out of love on the way. Rosenberg sings about the places he's seen like he's remembering his first love, to a distinctly more dynamic, cinema-scope arrangement than previous records. "For years my head has always just been about the narrative and getting the vocal and lyrics to people, but with this record it's a bit more instrumental… it takes its time, it relaxes, it breathes a little bit more. My music can be quite intense and lyric heavy and so we have little intervals on this album."

One of these atmospheric *caesura* can be found on 'Somebody's Love', the first single, sounding (on the album version anyway) like Passenger emerging from DJ Shadow's 'Fixed Income'. The accompanying video, filmed on a lake in Iceland, sees Rosenberg rowing a boat that's been set on fire. I ask Mike if he did all his own stunts: "I was

"I don't make pop music – I'm not expecting to get to the top of the charts again. Just that once. Just those four minutes of music that I've given to the world"

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Gibson

exhausted. I've not got the largest biceps the world's ever seen. I hadn't really given it too much thought. It was very last minute, like it always is with Passenger. We decided to do the whole setting the boat on fire 24 hours before. We had to find a boat, fix the boat and find a lake. Rowing a boat that's on fire on a windy Icelandic lake… If I'd have thought about it, I might have come up with a different idea."

Water, in particular the sea, has always been a muse for Rosenberg, and its influence on his songwriting is evident on the new album. "I grew up in Brighton and I still live there now. I love the sea and I go swimming every day just to be close to the ocean. When you can see an end to things it reminds you that it's not all about you and your problems are really not that big. I always get that feeling when I look out to the sea."

Rosenberg uses his creative fuel efficiently, penning at a rate of an album a year. "I write a lot and I can write anywhere, so I do a lot of my writing on the road. I like keeping it all going all the time. After you haven't written for a while and you feel a bit rusty, it can feel daunting to try and get the whole thing going. I try not to have too many rules or set too many guidelines about how I write or where or for what reason. Just let it come as naturally as possible.

He adds: "It's generally guitar first. Some sort of guitar idea will discover itself, and you'll uncover it from there. Sometimes it's a lyrical idea that will spring into life. That's what I mean; keeping yourself really open to any which way is a good thing. It hopefully stops you falling into the same kind of patterns."

Has he been thinking about the next album yet? "I've kind of written it. I've done this throughout my career. I'll go in and record everything, but by the time that record is actually coming out, I've usually got enough songs for another one, which really takes the pressure off. Then you're not scrounging around for 10 songs you can put on a record. It also means you live with the songs for a year or two so there's no: 'I've just written this new song and I love it' and then in three months you realise that actually it's shit."

On stage, Passenger plays a Gibson J-45 ("I bash guitars around so much when I play them but these guys take it better than most") but in Neil Finn's studio for *Old as The Sea* he reverted to an old favourite: his Gibson J-50. "I bought it in Japan. It's beautiful. It's from the 60s and it's a bit wonky tuning-wise, and it's a bit temperamental, but by the time I'm 65 I probably will be as well. I recorded a lot of the new stuff on it as well as Neil Finn's guitar [another '60s vintage Gibson]. I'd never played a nicer guitar. I wish I could have nabbed it off him at the end. It was perfect. It stayed in tune so well, and the tone of it was like nothing else really. I'm on the hunt for something similar if I can find it."

Since moving on from his Larrivée, Rosenberg considers himself "a real Gibson man. I sometimes play Hummingbirds on stage as well. I find them slightly sweeter to pick, but they can't cope with the hustle and bustle of touring quite as well. I've got a couple of Martins. I've got a few bits and pieces. I went to South Africa a couple of years ago and got a guitar made out of an oil drum. It sounds really great, it's not just a novelty thing. It sounds fantastic plugged in. The collection is starting to grow a little bit." Any oil drum strumming on the new record? "Oil drum guitar did not make it on to this album but maybe next time."

> **"When you can see an end to things it reminds you that it's not all about you and your problems are really not that big"**

One novelty for Rosenberg on this album cycle is the full band sound. Not only does a Passenger album feature a full band from its conception for the first time since Passenger stopped being a group, but that same band will also go touring. "For the first time in about 500 years I'll be playing with a full band. From October 'til next summer it's full band touring. We'll be doing Europe and the UK towards the end of this year and then summer festivals next year. Because this record is such a big sound, I don't know how I would have played it on my own."

He adds: "Some people have been coming to my gigs for seven or eight years. When it's just you and guitar, you can't reinvent it. It is what it is. For them, and for myself it's just good to give us all something different."

Any Passenger fans needn't worry that the difference might be something to do with chasing the next billion views. "I don't make pop music – I'm not expecting to get to the top of the charts again. Just that once. Just those four minutes of music that I've given to the world."

Any artist who lives behind only the acoustic is capable of 'doing a Judas' and switching to electric like one of Mike's heroes, Dylan. "There are some brilliant electric guitar players and I'm not one of them. I put my time and effort into acoustic guitar and learning how to shape songs with an acoustic and it feels like an extra limb to me now. I think there was always going to be an acoustic thread through whatever I do. Apart from the 19th album, which will be a gangster rap album."

In a twist on *Desert Island Discs*, I ask Mike which billion-viewed song he would inflict on his worst enemy. "Bieber, Perry, Swift. Wow, Perry's up there, isn't she?" he says, scrolling through the list. "'Wheels on the Bus'? A billion views? I mean, that would be pretty horrible on a desert island, just over and over. It's gotta be 'Gangnam Style', it's unbearable. I mean, sorry Psy, but it is. He doesn't care what I think, but yeah: awful!"

When I give Mike the exact *Let Her Go* click tally, he seems astounded by the fact it had gone up by 48 million since he last looked. Since the interview it's gone up another 40,000. Not bad for a folk singer from Brighton. I ask if he's ever recognised in the street: "Never. It's amazing"

Home or anywhere? "Anywhere. Honestly, I can headline a festival – at the weekend I played to 25,000 people then walked round an hour later with a hat on – absolutely fine! A couple of people double-taked. I think I just look like your average hipster, really: skinny jeans, stupid beard. People just leave me alone."

Before turning pro and racking up a billion hits, Mike was a chef and was once offered a head chef position that would have meant music taking a back seat. Was he tempted? "I didn't really seriously consider it. I would have felt I'd have stabbed myself in the back a little bit." My attention turns to food. Lunch was an over an hour ago. I ask what his signature dish is: "I quite like making ramen. I'm quite into Japanese food. There's quite an art to making a good ramen." A bit like music? "Absolutely. You can take time over it and create something. It's not a million miles away at all." But you can't share ramen with a billion people…"You can't. The logistics would be a nightmare." ■

Passenger's *Young As The Morning, Old As The Sea* is out 23 September.

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BILLY McCARTHY

WORDS: SEAN REID IMAGES: OLLY CURTIS

Speaking shortly before announcing his band's split, Billy McCarthy of Augustines chats about his acoustic upbringing and the value of music

Overcoming tragedy through music has been a trait that has existed for many years – and tragedy serves as the backbone to Augustines' existence, with 2012's debut album, *Rise Ye Sunken Ships*, revolving around the suicide of James McCarthy, the brother of frontman Billy McCarthy. Since their first record, McCarthy along with multi-instrumentalist Eric Sanderson and drummer Rob Allen, have gone from strength to strength, touring relentlessly on both sides of the Atlantic and further afield with two additional albums to their catalogue: 2014's *Augustines* and their latest release, which came out earlier this year, *This Is Your Life*.

"It started out as a battle cry like, 'This is your life!'" explains McCarthy when we meet at 2000 Trees Festival in Cheltenham. "Then after seeing what's going on in my country, even in yours and everyone else's, well, if we keep making these choices then this is your life."

As McCarthy suggests, the band's third LP serves as an call for unity as it rushes out of the gates with the Springsteen-esque 'Are We Alive?', while songs like 'Landmine', 'When Things Fall Apart' and 'Running In Place' resonate with positivity, enhanced by McCarthy's confessional tone. The record also sees the trio step out of the standard rock band set-up of guitar, bass and drums, incorporating electronic elements.

"We decided we were comfortable enough creatively to try do stuff we admired. We had been listening to a lot of Kate Bush, Peter Gabriel, Men at Work and also a lot of world music. What is really cool about that music is that it's got its own soul to it. We're sort of obsessed with being pure and being really organic. A lot of the stuff on the album was coming from a soulful place. It was an experiment but I think it worked."

It's clear the band have embraced different cultures and sounds while on their travels. The aforementioned 'Running In Place' sees Augustines collaborate with Senegalese duo Pape & Cheikh. "It was a joy to be brave and play with some people you want to play with," says McCarthy, "it's something we listened to to turn off our brains. Maybe because it's in another language but some of it is in English. I've just enjoyed it for a lot of my life."

Having built a strong reputation for their interactive live shows, McCarthy and company continue to provide their fans with an opportunity to escape from everyday life: "There's a massive amount of darkness around us. It hasn't stopped since the beginning of the record: the Bataclan, Orlando, Dallas… The darkness isn't going away," explains McCarthy. "If it's not the darkness around us, it's religious zealots or it's the celebrity-obsessed media who are selling fear and suffering, trying to get traffic on their sites. They like to keep you scared. This has been going on for half a century. People have to be a little smarter. Maybe we don't give these people traffic. It's putting fear into people's minds and it's in your phone and everything you do. It's being rammed down your throat."

With political, social and economical struggles being magnified across the world, McCarthy feels music is needed during times like this: "I think music will never get stomped out, no matter, even if it's illegal in some countries. It's ridiculous. Music will never die. You just have to fight the best you can through it. Stop. Write about it and put it out. Go out and perform it. Music gives people the chance to set things right."

Augustines are no strangers to the UK having been regular visitors for several years. "I think we came here 15 times on our first record so it's a second home for me," says McCarthy. Their recent run of festival appearances marked their third time on these shores this year alone, while a fourth visit later this year will see them play their biggest UK shows to date, including a show at London's Brixton Academy. "We released our record in festival season, so we're yet to properly do our show. I'm looking forward to that," confirms McCarthy.

Asked about their approach to festival shows compared to their own shows, McCarthy explains: "The festivals can be, as we say, 'throw and go'. There's no sound check, you just get thrown up there. The reward is that people are there to have a good time and they literally want to be lifted up out of their Monday to Friday lives. They're difficult shows to play. Our own shows are put together and are well thought out. The challenge for our own shows is making them have spontaneity. So you're never comfortable as an artist and you never should be."

McCarthy has a humble attitude to playing festivals – far from that of your average egotistical touring rock star. "You have to fucking get over yourself. That's the first rule," says McCarthy. "There's nothing you can do. It's not about you. That's Augustines' motto: 'It's not about us.'"

When it comes to guitars, McCarthy started modestly, he says, on a Yamaha beginners' model: "I loved that guitar – I played it loads. I have a version now that is a 1970s dreadnought. I busked with that guitar all over the world. I've written so much on it, and it's probably defined my ear. It's got a strong mid-range presence. It's nothing special but does have a bit of low end like a Gibson J200. I've been playing Martins pretty exclusively now though. I love them. I play the 00-15M and D-18E Retro." And he is also a fan of Gibson's L-200 Emmylou Harris guitar ("I absolutely love playing that guitar. They are very bass-y. I just like bass in my guitar") as well as resonator guitars: "I like Dobros. I like the lore behind them. I play a Gretsch resonator. I think that's my Americana stuff coming through."

Blues music was key to his musical upbringing: he cites Lightnin' Hopkins, Muddy Waters and Mississippi John Hurt as influences and admits he was "immersed in the Americana thing." He names Jason Isbell, Tom Waits, Shane McGowan and Steve Earle as songwriting influences. "I like the guys who have one foot in the grave. Life isn't easy, especially when you're a musician. So guys who write from a street level I admire a lot."

An accident when McCarthy was a kid led to McCarthy losing the tip of his index finger, and subsequently he uses a shortcut when called upon to do fingerpicking: "I do a bit of a clawhammer fingerpicking style because that's the only one I can do simply because my index finger won't reach."

But theory-wise, McCarthy stays purposefully naïve. "I don't like to think about it too much. I don't always know what key I'm in. I don't know theory. If I stumble upon something, I marvel at that. That's the kind of excitement that keeps me going." ■

Augustines' farewell tour starts 16 October in Brighton. *This Is Your Life* is out now.
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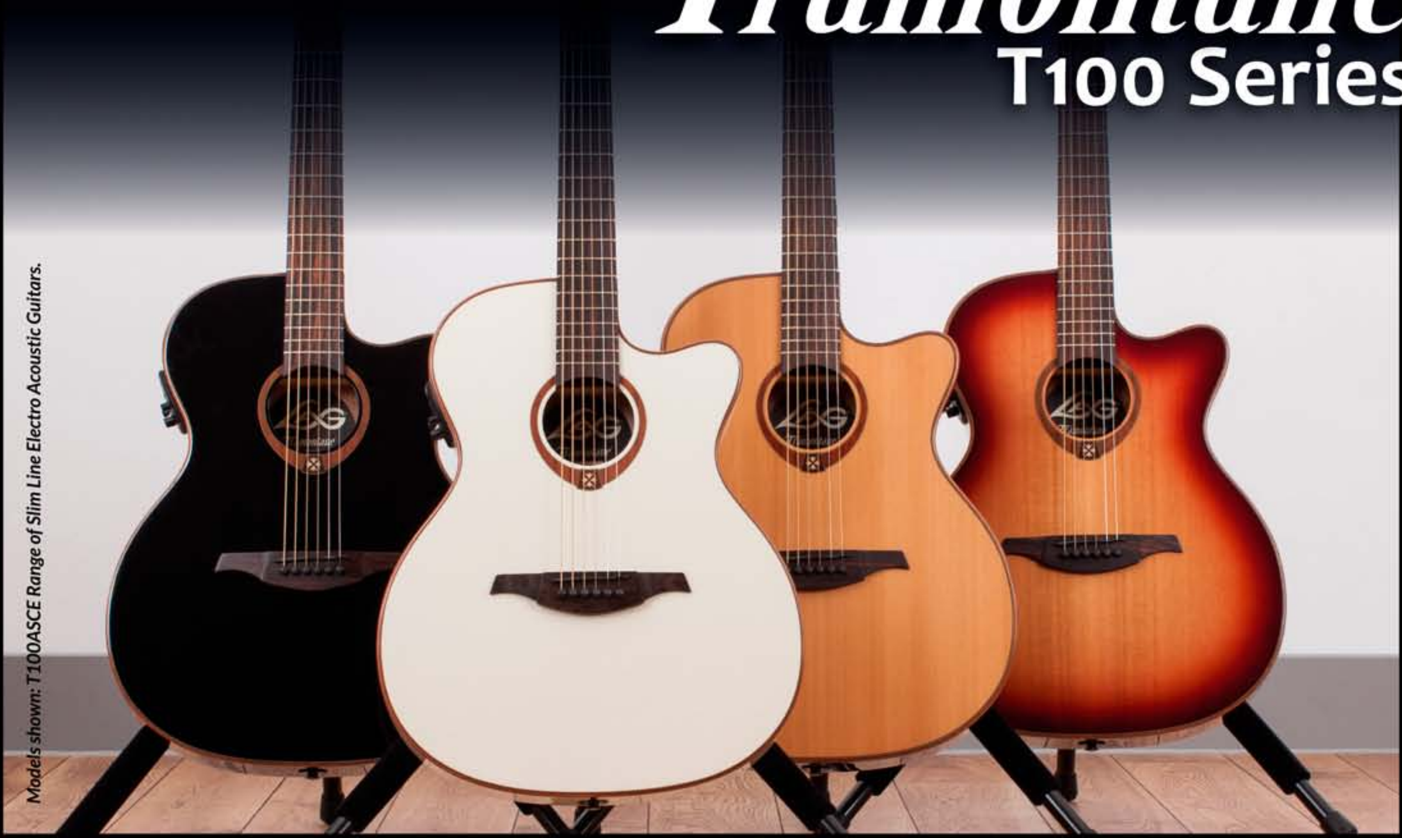

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SCOTT MATTHEWS

WORDS: GLENN KIMPTON

Home Part 2 is Scott Matthews' second album to be recorded at his home Shedio studio. We find out what inspired this new lease of life as a self-sufficient artist

Putting out five highly acclaimed studio albums is an impressive achievement – but having now produced two himself, Scott Matthews seems to be exuding an air of fresh confidence and determination, especially with regard to the superb *Home Part 2* album.

"I was very much aware of what I wanted to do with this album," he begins. "And that was to put it out on my own Shedio Records label, so I'm pretty liberated at the moment. I just decided to get something built down the bottom of the garden that I could retreat to, like a glorified demo space, and it's really gone from there."

It's not the first time we have spoken to an artist recently who has disregarded the confines of the big label companies and decided to strike out alone. "You could argue that the all encompassing industry is something that you don't necessarily need these days," he says, after a moment's consideration. "Especially if you're an emerging artist. But now you've got seasoned pros following suit. I'm really embracing the cottage industry movement right now."

It may just be an optimistic imagining, but from the albums we have heard of late, the ones that have gone down the self-recording route, have a certain warmth to them. "Well one thing now is that in terms of gear and recording mediums, the quality has improved so much that you can learn enough along the way to do it yourself with a good preamp and a mic and not much more stuff.

"A lot of people are doing it now because it can get very expensive very quickly, spending 300 quid a day on a recording studio," he continues. "And it's low risk, because if it doesn't work how you want it to, you haven't lost much and you don't have a guy from the label breathing down your neck. There's been real scope to fine-tune my songs, since I've been in the Shedio."

Speaking to Matthews, it seems that his move from label employee to self-sustainable musician has been incredibly positive. "I think, after 12 years, I now have a real grasp of my motives for doing this; for living and breathing and writing songs," he says. "For me there's always been a real concentration on the art form and the musical world I'm trying to create and that's at the forefront now more than at any point recently. It can be a difficult and daunting process, but I do think that if you get to a place where you're writing to order, it's time to pack it in, and I know people under pressure now whose reasons for creating are questionable."

The feel of *Home Part 2* is one of an artist at the top of his game, having fun making the music he wants to make. "There is buoyancy to the album, I think," he ventures. "In terms of instrumentation, there is a lifting of spirits in the songs and that was intentional. I certainly see the two *Home* records in terms of colour and *Part 1* is definitely the sepia-tinged album, whereas this is the 'techni-coloured brother', if you will. There's a real optimistic feel, which is like rekindling the artist I was 10 years ago."

So it's a companion and a departure from *Part 1*? "Yeah I think so," he agrees. "It's like it's gone full circle and gotten a sense of the roots of it all again. The overriding feeling is that people still dig my first album, and although I'm a more refined writer, I wanted to tap into that mood, while progressing as an artist and writing a more eclectic record."

As well as being a more eclectic album, *Part 2* is also a more electric set than the previous, with the plugged-in sound circling the acoustic centre of the songs on many tracks. "That's pretty much all down to my new guitarist, Paul Connop," Matthews laughs. "He's completely gear obsessed, worse than me! I borrowed some of his vintage Gibsons and a beautiful Lazy J-20 custom amp, and when I played some of the acoustic songs as more electric, I felt they shone a bit more."

I wonder how Matthews' devoted following will react to this new sheen on some of the tracks. "Ah, I think they'll embrace it!" he counters. "I never write on electric guitar; all my songs are acoustic at the core, but sometimes I felt the riffs needed a lift. There's a real mixed bag on there, with some delicate pulsing classical guitar parts, like on a new song called 'Stay in Bed', which has quite a coarse, almost gut string feel. But then you've got sweet, chiming, organic textured songs, like the first one, 'Drifter'. So there's an organic edge, but also some really clean electric songs, almost like a doffing of the cap to Lindsey Buckingham. It's not driven guitars as such, but more of a chime and a texture. I suppose it's just an alternative to stacking up the acoustic guitars; I can record three or four electrics really clean to create a wall of texture, which fascinates me and it feels really good."

There's no denying that Matthews is excited by this one, claiming that *Part 2* is the most he has looked forward to an album dropping so far; but it's also the live shows that are working him up, gigs that are far from the 'one man and his dog' format of the early years. "There are lots of colours to this band, so I can't wait to perform it," he states. "We have two period instruments, an 1861 double bass,

which John Thorne is playing, and my cellist Danny Keane has an 1850 cello, so there's this history to the music and it's wonderful to have these period instruments making sounds on my songs."

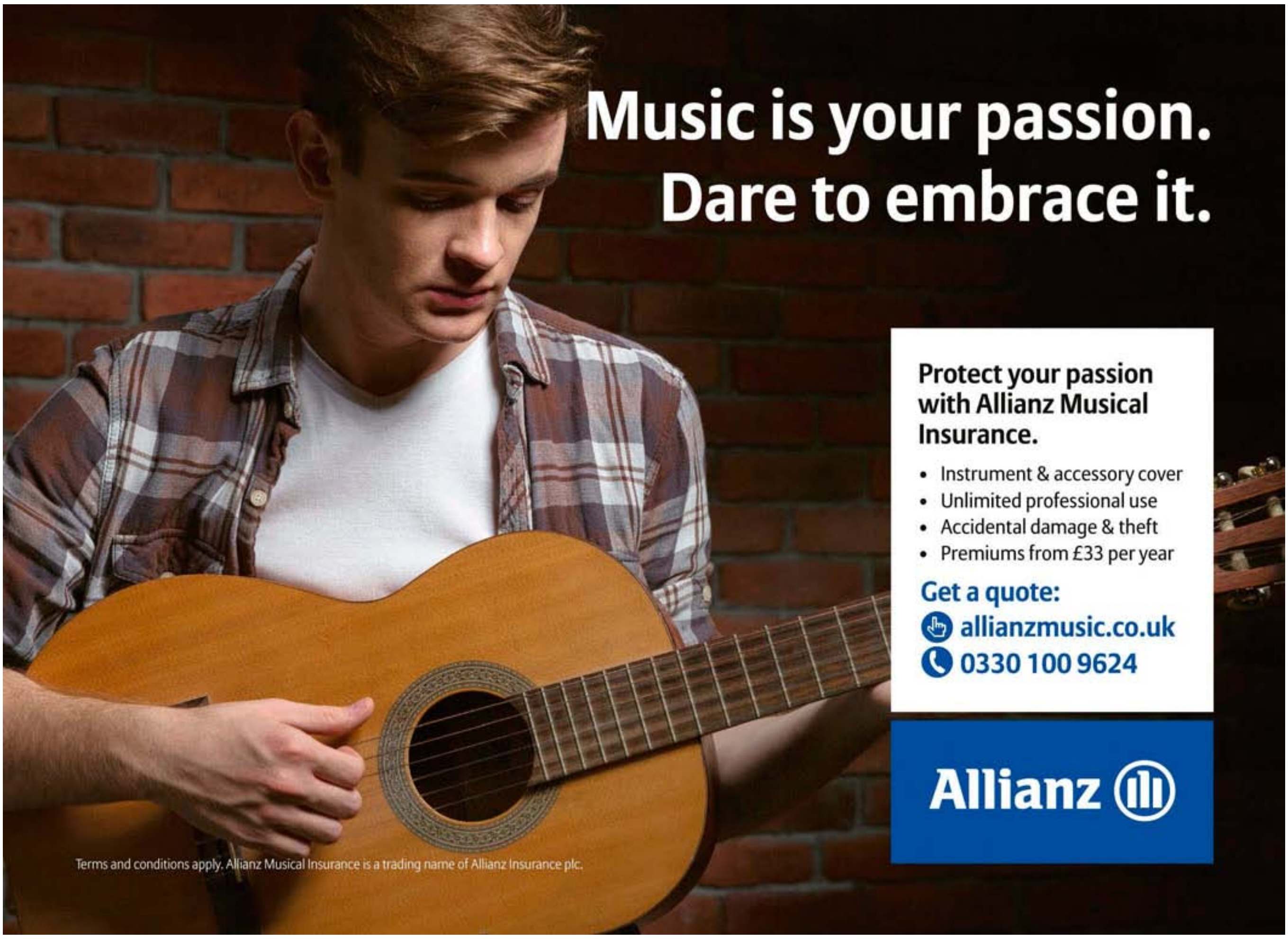
Moving on to some further gear chat, Matthews immediately heads into an enthused explanation of a new song he's been working on. "It's a tune called 'Where I Long to Be', which I play on my cool Norman B-20 12-string guitar; I've had it for about 10 years. I've put that through two pickups and given it this kind of fluttery chorus sound, with a Cocteau Twins vibe, so it's very ethereal. But the second pickup is quite earthy, and it goes straight into an acoustic amp, so the marriage is quite powerful."

As well as the Norman guitar, Matthews uses a big Guild F-212XL, a super strong jumbo instrument. "Guild still make great guitars," Matthews claims. "I'm on their roster and I'm waiting for the new UK distribution to come in, so I can play some of their new guitars, which is exciting. It was a great move getting Ren Ferguson [vice president of manufacturing and R&D at Guild] involved, because I think the company needed a shake up. I think he's really fine-tuning them now and it's good for them. I've still got my old D-25 from 1975, and although it's a heavy guitar, it's the mellowest thing in the world and it lends itself to all kinds of music; it's a real 'pick me up' guitar. I also had a gut-strung all mahogany classical guitar from the 60s called a Guild Mark 1, which has this really interesting dry percussive sound." A slight sigh is audible and the inevitable pain of a prolific player emerges. "I regret selling that one, man, but my biggest regret is getting rid of an old 1951 Gibson LG-2. It was a killer guitar, but at the time I needed the cash real bad, so that one had to go. But they do come and go, don't they? And each guitar inspires a new set of songs." ■

***Home Part 2* is out September 19 on Shedio Records, with a UK tour in November and December.**

GEAR

As we see, it's not at all difficult to get Matthews to chat gear, so we managed to corner him on which of the numerous guitars that he has played is his favourite. "I currently only have about six guitars, but I'm always searching for the next thing, a bit obsessively. My favourite right now is a Maton, which I bought in Australia at a lovely little place called Music Swop Shop in Melbourne. It's from the year I was born, 1976, and it's an old classical, made with what I think is some exotic koa on the back. That guitar's a beast, it sounds so huge and powerful, so it's not suitable for everything; sometimes I think my voice is too quiet for its level, but it's a songwriting guitar and I love it to bits. It's got cracks in it now, from hating the lovely English weather, so I have to talk to it and say 'don't worry mate, we'll go back to Australia one day!'"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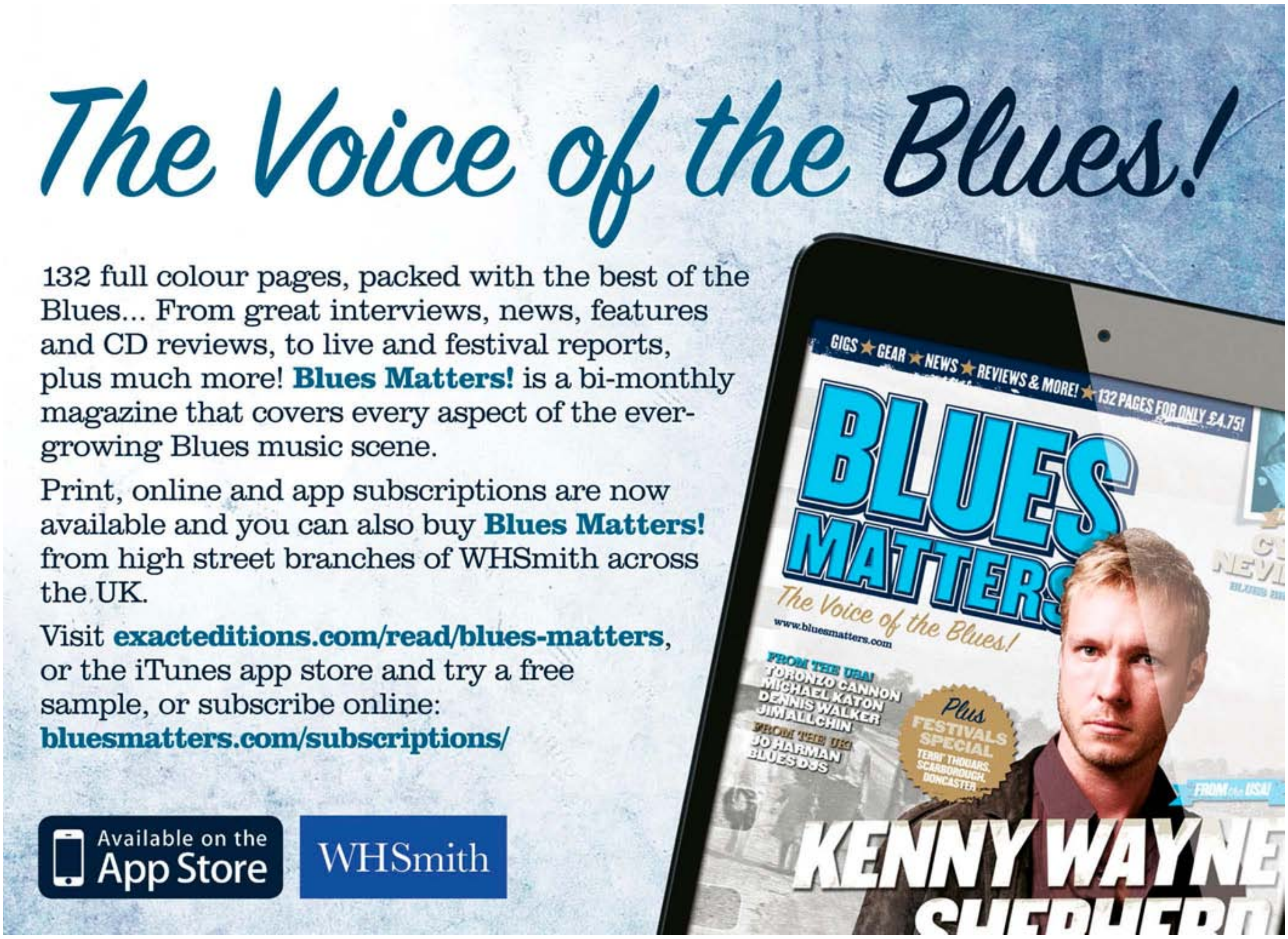
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KENNY WAYNE

TOM BROSSEAU

Ahead of his UK tour in October, North Dakotan storyteller and guitarist Tom Brosseau chats to us about his playing style, biggest influences and the importance of playing simply

I have become so interested in the acoustic guitar. Obsessed, I'd say. The history, build, the maker… all of it. Right now I am using a very special guitar built by Kevin Muiderman of Thompson, North Dakota. It's a modest instrument. The woods used are common woods but beautiful. The inlay work around the soundhole of the guitar has poplar wood from a local source. Poplar is frequently used in North Dakota around a farmstead to shelter the farmhouse from harsh winds. I think of that whenever I play the Muiderman guitar, that no matter where I may be a little piece of home is with me.

My guitar playing is something I work at everyday. I play in the morning, and I play at night for about an hour before I go to bed. Sometimes I worry that if I don't play I'll forget how to or lose my talent. But then my guitar is the closest thing to me: closer than any girlfriend, closer than any friend. I go to it naturally and want to spend as much time with it as possible. It's tough for me to take a trip and not bring my guitar along. I'm relieved to find that if I do take a trip without my guitar I still have my chops when I return to the fretboard. I need to remind myself that it's OK to put it down for a little bit. I can be so one-tracked.

My favourite playing style is the Maybelle Carter style, where the melody is played on the sixth, fifth and fourth strings. It's deceptively simple. Listen to Maybelle playing 'Black Jack David' and you might think, 'Oh, that's a cinch to play', but for me at least it takes practice.

Recently I've been studying ragtime guitar playing, mostly by viewing online tutorials and listening to Blind Blake. That's a whole other beast. I like the challenge though. And it gets me away from flatpicking.

It's important to do anything with confidence. Progress but don't overstretch; enjoy the work, but don't be too quick to get through a lesson. Playing fast is a lot of fun, and it is impressive, but it's not so important. Neither is learning all the chords. I would say learn enough – become versed. It's like that book on grammar called *The Elements of Style*. Fancy words are not where it's at. You drop a fancy word on someone and they're not going to know what you're talking about. You don't want to alienate anyone in language; you don't want to alienate anyone in music, either. Instead, play simply.

> **"Progress but don't overstretch; enjoy the work, but don't be too quick to get through a lesson"**

Alternate tunings can be a lot of fun, I'm sure, but I've not worked my way up to incorporating that into my work. And I don't know if I'll ever take the time. I'm having so much fun just playing in standard tuning.

I visit guitar shops frequently. Sometimes I live at guitar shops. I just love seeing all the acoustic guitars hanging on the walls. I pull one down and dream a little.

My favorite guitar I ever played was an Epiphone Texan from the early 1960s. It was at Willie's American Guitars in St. Paul, Minnesota. I don't know what it was exactly that made the guitar so special. I couldn't have told you then, and I don't know if I can tell you now. Perhaps it comes down to the fact it was well built and matured in all the right ways. I still have the sound of that guitar in my head and every now and then when I play a vintage acoustic guitar I'll hear it.

My guitar heroes are Etta Baker, Elizabeth Cotten and Maybelle Carter. These guitar players had their own technique and played simply. If you care to, have a listen to these particular songs: 'Round My Back Door Selling Coal' by Etta Baker, 'Washington Blues' by Elizabeth Cotten and 'Black Jack David' by the Carter family.

I have released a new album, *North Dakota Impressions* (Crossbill Records), and currently I'm on tour in support of that album. It's a nine-song album, a continuation of my last two Crossbill Records releases, *Grass Punks* (2014) and *Perfect Abandon* (2015).

***North Dakota Impressions* is out now. Brosseau will be touring the UK in October. More info: www.tombrosseau.com**

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TERRA LIGHTFOOT

Ahead of her UK tour in October, Terra Lightfoot lets us know the story of favourite guitars and why alternate tunings are off the agenda

My guitar style mostly sees me playing the melody on guitar while still supporting the chords underneath. I love Chet Atkins and the old blues greats like Lightnin' Hopkins, Junior Kimborough, Lead Belly… and I love the blues folk country style made famous by Mother Maybelle Carter. So I meld all of that admiration into how I approach the guitar. I also admire Jeff Buckley's style.

I currently play Gibson, Larivée and Epiphone guitars with open tunings. They are wonderful. I like open G, I have a few songs in that tuning on this album ('See You In The Morning' and 'Lily's Fair'). I've also created my own tunings in the past, but it's challenging to work them into a live show. That's my biggest obstacle with alternate tunings – having enough guitars to make the transitions seamless.

My first acoustic was an Anjo that my mother picked up at a garage sale. It had a terrible action, but I had no idea at the time and thought it was just very difficult to play guitar in general. Luckily I stuck with it through that first year until my uncle gave me a white Squier Stratocaster copy that I fell in love with.

My favourite acoustic ever to date is a well-worn 1960s Gibson Dove. It belonged to my friend's father and every time I went over there I would play the guitar and never wanted to put it down. There were beautiful crackles in the finish.

John Fahey, James Burton and Bonnie Raitt are my guitar idols. Cindy Cashdollar is a steel guitar hero of mine, and Daniel Lanois is also a tone king. You guys should check out John Fahey, particularly *Old Fashioned Love.*

Terra Lightfoot have just released our album *Every Time My Mind Runs Wild* and we're busy touring the UK and Europe in support of it. We toured the UK in May and got to see some of the countryside, which was really beautiful. But we'll also be playing other parts of Europe this time around.

I'm also really excited because a young Canadian luthier, Ashley Leanne, has decided to make me a guitar. She's a young guitar builder who's just growing her business, and I got to work with her selecting the wood, finish, body shape, custom inlays and pickup. Ashley's been working on the guitar for three months now and I can't wait to get hold of it. You can see more of her work at www.ashleyleannemusic.ca/luthier. ■

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DALLAS GREEN

WORDS: EMILY BIELBY **LEAD IMAGE:** OLLY CURTIS

Award-winning Canadian songwriter and guitarist Dallas Green of Alexisonfire and City & Colour chats about his love for C.F. Martin & Co. guitars and revisits childhood encounters with the guitar and grunge music

"I follow my basketball and baseball teams from Toronto religiously so that keeps me busy when I'm not playing," laughs Dallas Green as we discuss what's been keeping him occupied since the release of his newest record last year. But, although he likes to keep on top of his sport, Green admits he's never not working on new material. "Whenever I'm home in between shows and things like that, I'm always fiddling and playing the guitar; trying to come up with little fragments of things that, once I've finished touring, I'll sit down and work with. That's always how I've worked. I'm not very good at writing on the road."

Having been a long-standing fan of Martin & Co. since he first picked up a guitar, it's no surprise to learn that Green is endorsed by them. "Fred Green, who was the head of the custom shop at the time, and I talked a little bit and collaborated on some ideas," Green says. "I love guitars obviously and I've been playing them more than half my life, but I'm not very schooled in all of the specifics and details like some people are. So for me, I knew what I wanted to base the idea on and then I just sort of gave Fred free rein in a way. I knew I wanted a Dreadnought style, so it's based on an HD-28, which is a smaller Dreadnought and it had a slotted headstock – those are the two things I really wanted. I also wanted it to have a sunburst finish. After that I just told Fred to go for it and use whatever wood he felt was right for that shape, and he went from there. A couple of months later I got this guitar and it's the best thing I've ever held in my hands. Since I got it three and a half years ago it's the one guitar I've played at every show since, whether it's a short set or a long set, acoustic performance or full band, that's the guitar that's been with me at every show. Every time I pick it up when I go on stage I'm still shocked that it's mine and that it was built by Martin for me, it's a very strange feeling to me."

Green isn't shy around the fact that his custom built Martin is his pride and joy and undoubtedly his personal favourite, but his collection also comprises of a few others he's particularly fond of. "I have an old 1944 Martin, but I leave my older ones at home now, which is nice because I don't have to worry about them falling apart or getting damaged. They gave me a D-41, which my wife had them make for me for our fifth wedding anniversary, so that and my custom are the ones I use live. They also gave me a small parlour style guitar for my birthday a couple of years ago, which I use as my back-stage warm-up guitar."

Although the majority of his acoustic guitar collection is Martin, Green admits to taking a liking to Gibson acoustics as well. "The Martins are what I play live, but at home I have a couple of other models that I'll fiddle around with," Green says. "There's an old Gibson J-45 acoustic guitar that I really like and have had for a very long time. It's a good tool for writing; I just don't feel very comfortable playing that live because I've had it forever.

"I also have this old Gibson Kay acoustic that I got in a shop in Toronto," he adds. "It's not necessarily a baritone but we call it a baritone because I tune it down to C and for some reason it holds that tuning really well. I've been able to write some weird songs on it because it's such a low tuning but I can sing really high over it. I'll bring that out on solo tours, but I've never seen another one like it so if it breaks I'd be very disappointed. It's so old that I wouldn't know how to replace it."

"Guitar is still a very harsh mistress to me – there are days I feel like I'm good at it and there are days I don't understand it whatsoever"

In Martin and Gibson, Dallas has found guitars that he will never part ways with, but it was his uncle's old Fender that he first picked up and learned to play on. "My uncle Dean had a guitar when he was younger," Green says. "He found out I was taking lessons and he gave me this old Fender acoustic that he had in his basement. He also gave me an old Gibson amplifier too, but as a goofy teenager I sold both of them because I felt I wanted something different. I regret that decision every day because I wish I still had the first stuff that I learned on."

"I hope that I've got a little bit better over the years," laughs Green, when questioned about changes to his playing technique and style throughout the many years he's been playing. "Though some days I just pick up the guitar and think 'I don't even know what this is that I'm holding'. The more you play the more you start to figure out new avenues, easier or more interesting ways to do things. I always used to tune my guitar to all these weird tunings just to try and find new song ideas. I think I'm still the same player, maybe a little bit different, but I'm still obsessed with effects pedals, guitars and amps; I'm still just obsessed as I was when I was a kid. It's the endless search for what feels right, because one day you can feel like you're the best in the world and the next day you can feel like you have no idea what you're doing, that's what's so intriguing about playing guitar."

After his parents had booked him guitar lessons aged eight, it was grunge music that really started his love affair with the guitar and pushed him into becoming the musician he is today. "I remember when I was first able to bring in a cassette. My guitar teacher listened to the song and then transcribed it and showed me how to play it by listening to the song, which was when I became hooked. I think the song was either 'Alive' or 'Even Flow' by Pearl Jam. I was 11 years old when those records came out and trying to learn all of Pearl Jam's *Ten* and all of Alice In Chain's *Dirt* really was my goal," admits Green.

He expresses his frustration towards fingerpicking, which he also learned at a young age. "I still can't really do it even now, it's so frustrating," laughs Green. "I do it differently every time and I don't really have a structure when it comes to fingerpicking. I'm not very regimented in the way I play guitar. Guitar is still a very harsh mistress to me, there are days I feel like I'm good at it and there are days I don't understand it whatsoever."

With digital technology rapidly taking the music industry by storm, I was curious to find out if there were many young aspiring guitarists trying to make a break out of Canada and head for the spotlight. "Electronic music is very popular now; a lot of people nowadays like their music to sound like an app and that's cool, but I hope there are still people who are interested in the guitar. Sometimes I'll read things about bands that have changed their sound because they're just bored with the guitar and I get that, but I don't think I could ever be bored with it. I think there are very few people who can conquer the guitar completely, there's always going to be songs hidden in there somewhere. People say guitar music is dead, but I don't think that's true – I play guitar and I'm not dead." ■

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ACOUSTIC GEAR REVIEWS

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ARRENBIE MODEL 00

A custom-built slice of exquisite beauty from Belgium which sports more woods than you can shake a stick at

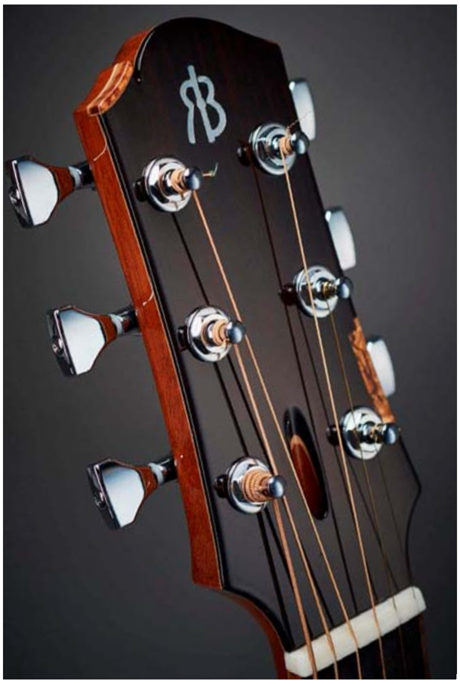
WORDS: OLLIE MCGHIE **IMAGES:** JOBY SESSIONS

The advantage of working as an independent luthier is that you can explore building techniques, experiment with all manner of stringed apparatus, add your own nuances and tinker away until you've crafted a truly bespoke instrument. Ralph Bonte from Bruges in Belgium, founder of Arrenbie Guitars, is one such luthier. He has been making instruments including electrics, acoustics, mandolins, ukuleles and archtops since 1994.

The guitar for review here is fresh from Bonte's workshop. You can literally smell the glue. Most of Ralph's guitars have distinctive names – 'Big Fella', 'The Graduate', 'Hyppocampus', 'Little Hercules' and 'Dr. Walnut' – but this guitar is named more simply: 'Model 00'.

His inspiration to build an instrument with a smaller frame came about after a period of making large jumbo guitars. Recurrent shoulder problems also meant he was looking to build a lighter framed instrument. The specific 00 model was also inspired through his work at the Leonardo Guitar Research Project (LGRP), an organisation that explores the possibilities of making acoustic and classical guitars from non-tropical woods. Bonte says, "Adrian Lucas [who teachers at LGRP] had done a drawing of a size 00 guitar, and I asked him if I could make one with my own design." Lucas acquiesced.

While the Model 00 doesn't adhere to the general ethos of LGRP, it does have a truly unique design. The attention to detail is exquisite. The rosette is like an interrupted cadence manifested as a Salvador Dalí motif. "It's not easy," Bonte says about the construction of the rosette. "The simplest thing to do is cut two circles and you're done. But the way it's done here with inlay and using small bits and pieces makes it a very fiddly and time consuming process." Inlays intersect, overlap; they even appear to continue across the fingerboard like abstract punctuation marks imprinted forever into the design. This is surrealism at its most playful – blending



"It's the subtlety in the design that aids in the projection and warmth of the Model 00's sound"

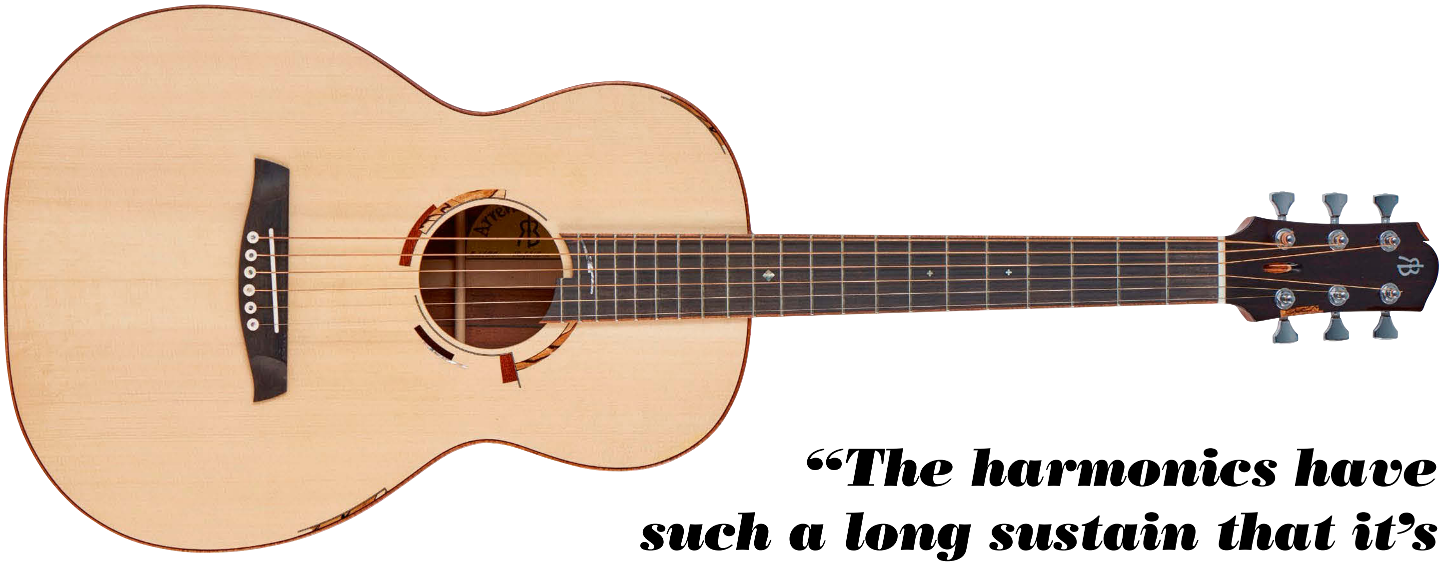
the styles of Joan Miró and Dalí into his own design. A plethora of woods and materials are used to construct this visual effect: from spalted beech to abalone and Vietnamese rosewood.

Bonte admits, however, that the distinctiveness of the guitar is not entirely unique. "The rosette design is an ode to Michihiro Matsuda in California, who has paved the way with guitars using this sort of design. I contacted him personally to find out if it would be alright to make something similar myself. Luckily he said yes. Raymond Kraut also does them. They were both apprentices of Ervin Somogyi."

The neck is made of a piece of Honduran mahogany, which is over 50 years old. Two overlays sandwich the headstock – a rich, African blackwood on the top and rouge-tinted Vietnamese rosewood on the back. A small notch of spalted beech emphasises a neat little nick cut into the end, while the Arrenbie logo is embedded in mother of pearl. There is even a fine accent veneer of light maple, flush with the mahogany, which runs the length of the neck, drawing attention to the highly flamed koa. The same effect is used for the binding. In addition, the top features a delicate veneer of ebony, which frames the main soundboard. The soundboard itself is cut from moon spruce sourced from Switzerland.

Embellishing the heel of the guitar is a semicircular disc of spalted beech. On the end of the guitar another surprise is a purposefully cut irregular quadrilateral piece of the same wood. Its place there is not just decorative. "Normally when you try to fit the two sides together, you put an end graft there," Bonte says, "but since the joint of the two sides was almost perfect – with the lines of the Madagascan rosewood running seamlessly through – I didn't want to spoil that with an end graft, so I put in this piece of wood to highlight how the grain runs together. The rosewood is taken from an old beam I had been saving for a special project."

Made from Gaboon ebony, the fretboard has two reflective abalone fret markers at the fifth and seventh frets shaped like small medieval crosses. These guide your way to a larger diamond abalone fret marker at the 12th. At the high end of the neck, the top frets form a diving board into the soundhole. While this playful detail helps create an interesting antagonistic



> ***"The harmonics have such a long sustain that it's easy to forget keeping time"***

dynamism between the sound hole and the neck, it certainly caused Bonte a headache having to polish a miniscule portion of the top between the fretboard and the soundhole.

With the specs on offer it becomes almost impossible to predict what the guitar would sound like, but when I sit down to play it, the sound has a soft, mellow hue, unlike other spruce topped guitars. This is a surprise given that such tops generally produce sharper, percussive sounds. Conversely, this warmer tone gives way to a greater range of sounds to choose from. The high register plays the blues as well as the bass, though this is no revelation given that Bonte heads up his own blues band.

The right hand also has an easy time with a set of Martin Acoustic SP Custom Light (0.11-0.52) fitted, which lend themselves well to this particular instrument.

A result of having this warmer tone combined with the 00 size is the impression that this guitar doesn't project as well as other instruments with a similar size and materials. It certainly seems that way until you get the right hand right down by the bridge. The spruce top is also aided by the thinnest layer of French polish to maximise volume, whereas the back, sides and neck are spray finish. The sound hole is fractionally larger than the standard for a size 00, only by a couple of millimetres though. It is this subtlety in the design, which aids in the projection and warmth of the sound.

The action is relatively low so the left hand can flit over the guitar as required. With some vibrato and bends thrown in, blues licks carry irrespective of the smaller size body. The harmonics have such a long sustain that it's easy to forget keeping time.

As there are no pins for guitar straps I find myself adopting a more relaxed classical style posture. In this new genre the fingers move as if no barriers are in place. There is precision and there is poise in the Bach. There is attack in Isaac Albéniz's 'Asturias'. The guitar comes without any on board electronics, and suffice to

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"The Model 00 is clearly a labour of love underlined by a sincere air of unpretentiousness"

ARRENBIE MODEL 00

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Arrenbie
Model: Model 00
RRP: €3850
Body Size: 00
Made In: Belgium
Top: Moon spruce
Back and Sides: Madagascar rosewood
Bridge: Gaboon ebony
Neck: Honduran mahogany
Fingerboard: Gaboon ebony
Frets: 20
Tuners: Hipshot
Nut Width: 44mm
Scale Length: 632mm
Onboard Electrics: N/A
Strings Fitted: Martin Acoustic SP Custom Light (0.11-0.52)
Gig Bag/Case Included: Hiscox case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros Outstanding attention to detail in the build
Cons A hefty price tag
Overall Treat it like a parlour guitar and it will be nice to you

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ★★★★½
Sound Quality: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★½

CONTACT DETAILS

www.arrenbieguitars.be

say, Bonte has certainly intended this guitar to not stray far from home.

The guitar offers a strange mix of showmanship in the build, wrapped up with limitations in its potential for performance. In turn this awards the musician with a narrower field of opportunity to showcase their own talents and arguably less opportunity for the guitar to be viewed by others. For Bonte, it's clearly a labour of love underlined by a sincere air of unpretentiousness.

The Model 00 is truly for the individual soloist, possibly small acoustic ensemble work, and, like the parlour guitar, it gravitates towards easy-listening music. But it would also fare well for professional acoustic recording. Given the level of detail in the design (and a dear price tag of €3850, which includes an extremely durable Hiscox case) it makes sense that this guitar isn't lugged around, from venue to venue.

The guitar is available through Bonte's website (www.arrenbieguitars.be). As Bonte says, "I'd love to build more of this model, but it will be on commission."

I highly recommend you contact Bonte as soon as possible for your own bespoke Model 00. This guitar took about 260 hours to build from scratch, and people who are interested should consider the six months' wait period for a finished product. ■

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AUDEN CHESTER NEO PLUS

A mid-range model from one of the newer names on the UK acoustic scene. Is this level of quality at sub-£1000 true or just a glitch in the matrix?

WORDS: OLLIE MCGHIE **IMAGES:** JOBY SESSIONS

Auden launched in 2013 at the London Acoustic Guitar Show and its reputation has grown immeasurably since then. Their reputation is based on a few key values: handcraft, through skilled luthiers who hand make every instrument; exceptional sound, achieved through the choicest of onboard electrics; and quality source materials, which are sourced through FSC approved suppliers with minimal waste produced from their workshops. The guitars are built in China but the finishing processes and QC are completed in the UK workshops. This is where you get your chance to customise your guitar. Recently though, Auden has started the production of some the full models in the UK. They plan to release these over the next 12 months. Will this mean customisation can go even further? We'll have to wait and see.

The original Chester model was reviewed and given high praise in late 2014 and my recent review of their parlour in *Acoustic* showed they have the technical ability to craft quality instruments beyond the scope of normal acoustic guitars. On their website there is a small ad showing a Grace Country Jumbo that's coming soon, so it's certainly non-stop at Auden.

Doug Sparkes, the director at Auden, says: "We maintain quality, craftsmanship and innovation by only using the best materials we can get our hands on and only working with people who understand guitar building inside and out." No pressure on this review of the Chester Neo Plus then.

The Neo Plus series, of which this model is a part, is a range of guitars made from solid mahogany backs, sides and necks, solid cedar tops, real maple and rosewood binding and ebony fingerboards, bridges and pins. Alongside the Chester is the Emily Rose and the Julia. The intention is that these guitars are lightweight, big in sound and designed to fit into the folk/acoustic blues scene that Auden is establishing itself in.

"Other similar spec models I try for comparison just don't have the same liveliness of sound"

As with all Auden guitars, this model is named after a person. Tom Chester was the owner of Blank Tape Recording Studio's in Sheffield. As Sparkes says: "When I started the business I got together a team of people from different backgrounds in the music industry – a luthier, a guy from retail, a player, a recording guy, a business guy – to get their input into the design of the guitars we wanted to launch. The idea was to better understand what was important to them. As a thank you I named the Chester, Colton, Bowman, Marlow and Edgar after the members of that team."

The top uses a solid AAA grade of cedar and features a tobacco sunburst finish, which has a deep southern dark brown that gently fuses into a bronze amber around the sound-hole and ebony bridge, revealing a soft, dappled grain. The mahogany back and sides have a consistent, even grain and the shape of the guitar is based on Auden's classic 000 model but with a rounder, extended bout and a dovetail joint.

The binding and fret markers are made of solid maple. Around the edge of the top the maple is inset with black rosewood, which further accentuates the full body of the guitar. The rosette is of a similar construction but inverted, with the rosewood containing the maple. To the north of the guitar the headstock includes the Auden logo. The fingerboard and pins are made from dark ebony.

Holding the guitar close in a sitting position you can tell the guitar has life – the vibrations transfer straight to your body. It has an instant projection of sound. Other similar spec models I try for comparison just don't have the same liveliness of sound. One reason for is that the whole guitar is sealed rather than lacquered. "This process," Sparkes says, "allows the wood to move and vibrate more freely creating tone, resonance and volume."

The magnified range of volume of this guitar unbalances me momentarily, so much so I find it tricky to get a sweet *pianissimo* without a little practice. This guitar responds at the other of the dynamic range: the *fortissimo* is pretty impressive with a full, rounded sound, though not without some squeaky guttural noises picked up from the neck. But that could just be my technique.

The right hand has some excellent fingerstyle potential, combined with some

"You can tell the guitar has life – the vibrations transfer straight to your body"

untroublesome right arm action. I found that the top E string favoured a deeper angle of finger-nail plucking action to get the warmest tone, so only some minor adjustments in the position of the right arm, but the guitar did have an evenness of tone across all six strings, especially when the new 'zing' of the bass strings had leveled out.

The guitar sang cleanly in Paul Simon fingerstyle accompaniment, although the action was relatively low so I had to be careful with the left hand not creating too much of a buzz. With some of the blues standards from the likes of Howlin' Wolf and Robert Johnson, these strident utterances of the guitar, as previously mentioned, only add to the guitar's character. The Chester Neo Plus doesn't have a cutaway so you have a to stretch a little more to reach those higher notes, but what you might miss in accessibility you make up for in tone.

The Schertler Lydia EQ onboard electronics provide reliable tonal precision for amplification, incorporating revolutionary air chamber technology built around an ultra linear condenser microphone. The three volume, bass and treble dials are simple to use. Don't max out the volume though as it will only give you an unpleasant wooly distortion. When plugged in it produces a neutral, balanced sound – which encourages musicians to develop their own distinctive voice. Compared to playing unplugged you have more potential here in sound preparation– you can knock back the brighter sound, and take the guitar in a whole new direction without it sounding like some weird effect. Auden has found the perfect pickup to complement the guitar's tonal range. Auden also flies the flag for Schertler, choosing to distribute a range of their amplifiers, which are on hand in their showrooms.

Overall, this instrument has an extremely tidy and smart appearance. The satin seal gives it a smooth aesthetic of class and

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AUDEN
CHESTER NEO PLUS

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Auden
Model: Chester Neo Plus
RRP: £999
Made In: China (assembly in the UK)
Top: Cedar
Back and Sides: Solid mahogany
Bridge: Rosewood
Neck: Mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: Nickel Silver
Tuners: Schertler
Nut Width: 44mm
Scale Length: 650mm
Onboard Electrics: Schertler Lydia EQ
Strings Fitted: D'Addario EXP16s .12-.53
Gig Bag/Case Included: Hard Case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: For soloists and ensemble players alike
Cons: Some noise from the neck caused by a low action, but this is easily adjustable
Overall: A smooth finish with easy folk and blues playing

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ✪✪✪✪✪
Sound Quality: ✪✪✪✪✪
Overall: ✪✪✪✪✪

CONTACT DETAILS

www.audenguitars.com

maturity. It would fit well into a jazz or blues band and has the potential for professional soloists too.

The Neo Plus range of guitars comes with a black, chrome gig bag. Sporting a faux leather exterior, this case is a reliable asset for an instrument intended for professional playing. The Chester Neo Plus (and all the Neo models) retails at £999. Although on the expensive side of mid-range guitars, this understated model does include a lifetime build warranty, some of the accoutrements aforementioned in the Parlour Review (but I'll include them again here for your own reference: an Allen key for fine tuning, a buffing cloth, a pick guard and an invitation to visit Auden at their UK base in Northamptonshire to meet the team for getting your guitar set up) and the Schertler Lydia EQ system. As well as the case.

Against other main brand guitars with similar specs, Auden are positioning themselves competitively with the price and producing sounds of comparable timbre. It is strategic and it seems to be working. In fact that happens to be one of their long-term goals. Looking ahead to 2017 Auden will include the roll out of the company into a number of new retailers. They are currently in discussion with distributors in a number of different countries too. ■

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EASTMAN MD515 CLASSIC MANDOLIN

Eastman has cemented its place in the crowded middle of the mandolin market – but its sound is far from middle of the road

WORDS: SIMON MAYOR **IMAGES:** JOBY SESSIONS

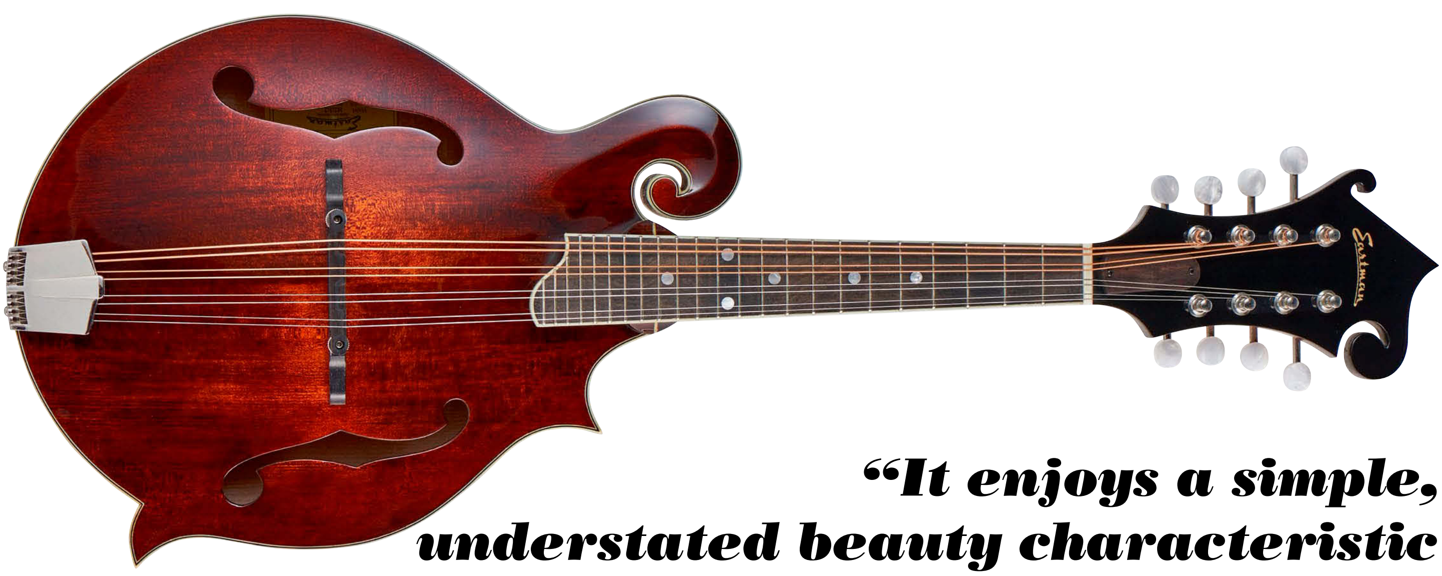
For one reason or another, quite a few Eastman mandolins have passed through my hands in recent years, so even before this one arrived for review I felt reasonably familiar with their output. But I hadn't tried this particular model, the MD515 Classic, which sits about halfway up what is quite an extensive range, so I was looking forward to a weekend with my temporary musical lodger. The word 'Classic' in its name refers to the deep mahogany-brown stained finish, and differentiates this model from the MD515-CS, which is sunburst; there is no price difference.

Although its background is in violins and bows, Eastman is now a very well established manufacturer of guitars and mandolins. It unashamedly takes inspiration from classics of the genre – vintage Gibsons and Martins – but with a manufacturing base in China, it is able to offer instruments at affordable rather than eye-watering prices. Certainly in the mandolin world it has ruffled a few feathers, and has actually been blamed in some quarters for the demise of certain US manufacturers. Quality is their byword, and it makes much of using traditional manufacturing methods with minimal use of power tools. Indeed, there is no such thing as a 'budget' Eastman; even its cheapest mandolin from the 300-series will set you back around £600.

The first thing that struck me as I took the MD515 from its hard-shell case was the crispness of the finish. Competition is so fierce these days among both individual luthiers and high-end manufacturers, that any tiny chisel slip or build-up of varnish in the nooks and crannies of the instrument – things that might not have been unusual 30 or 40 years ago – are now simply unacceptable. No such defects here. The ivoroid binding follows the intricate outline of this classic art nouveau mandolin shape – originated of course by the Gibson company early last century – with exemplary neatness, and the finish, while a rich red-brown, remains sufficiently transparent to reveal a beautifully close-grained piece of spruce on the front. The maple on the back and sides is similarly enhanced, although there are no wild flames to the grain here. There is no binding on the back (you'll have to move further up the Eastman range for that), so it may be susceptible to the occasional knock, but the fingerboard is bound. While I'm not a fan of heavily decorated instruments, this is a worthwhile lift to the cosmetic appeal and is the main point of difference between this MD515 and its cheaper sister, the MD315.

"I found myself drawn as much to playing classical pieces as I did to American fiddle tunes and hammering out chopped chords"

A semitone flat on arrival, it slid up to pitch very smoothly, courtesy of machine heads that superficially looked like Schallers, but are probably of Chinese manufacture. I played around with all eight and could find no stiff or loose spots. There is no discernible joint where the neck joins the headstock, but the entire neck and head section is constructed of three pieces of maple laminated together. This sends the grain in different directions and is favoured by many luthiers as structurally stronger than a single piece of wood. It is strengthened even more in this case by a truss rod, with a supplied adjustment key. It's a slightly chunkier neck than I'm used to, although not uncomfortable. The combination of the truss rod and the amount of wood give the instrument a neck-heavy feel; it's nothing I wouldn't get used to very quickly, and actually is a reassurance that it's not going to



"It enjoys a simple, understated beauty characteristic of all the Eastman range"

warp in a hurry. The tailpiece is cast chrome and the ebony bridge is of the traditional design for these F-style mandolins with the usual roller wheels for adjusting the action. For me, this wasn't necessary as the action suited me perfectly as supplied, and I was impressed with the accuracy of the fretting right up to a high D# – high enough for most. Some much-needed practice of chromatic scales revealed no fret buzzes or wolf notes.

It's all too easy to pick up this style of mandolin and think 'bluegrass'. Ever since Bill Monroe sported his Gibson F5, the scroll and points mandolin has become synonymous with that style of music, but it's important to remember that the design predates bluegrass, and when Gibson first made an F5, it simply wanted to make a great mandolin, not a great bluegrass mandolin. I mention this because with the Eastman I found myself drawn as much to playing classical pieces as I did to American fiddle tunes and hammering out chopped chords, and in that sense it's probably more in the spirit of the original Gibsons than many might assume.

The notes are even up and down the neck, with a fast, sparkling response in the higher registers and a slightly more constrained and 'nutty' quality to the low end. This is a feature I strongly associate with F-style mandolins and it could be due to the extra blocks of wood that are hanging onto the body in the form of the scroll and two points. I readily admit this is a guess, but I have always found the low end on A-style (simple teardrop shaped) instruments to have a more open, rounded quality. This is my personal preference, and the reason I've mostly played A-style instruments, although many prefer the 'F' sound, and after all, there is no single definition of 'good tone'. Eastman, to its credit, caters for both tastes.

While the MD515 was impressive for a brand new mandolin, I felt more was lurking

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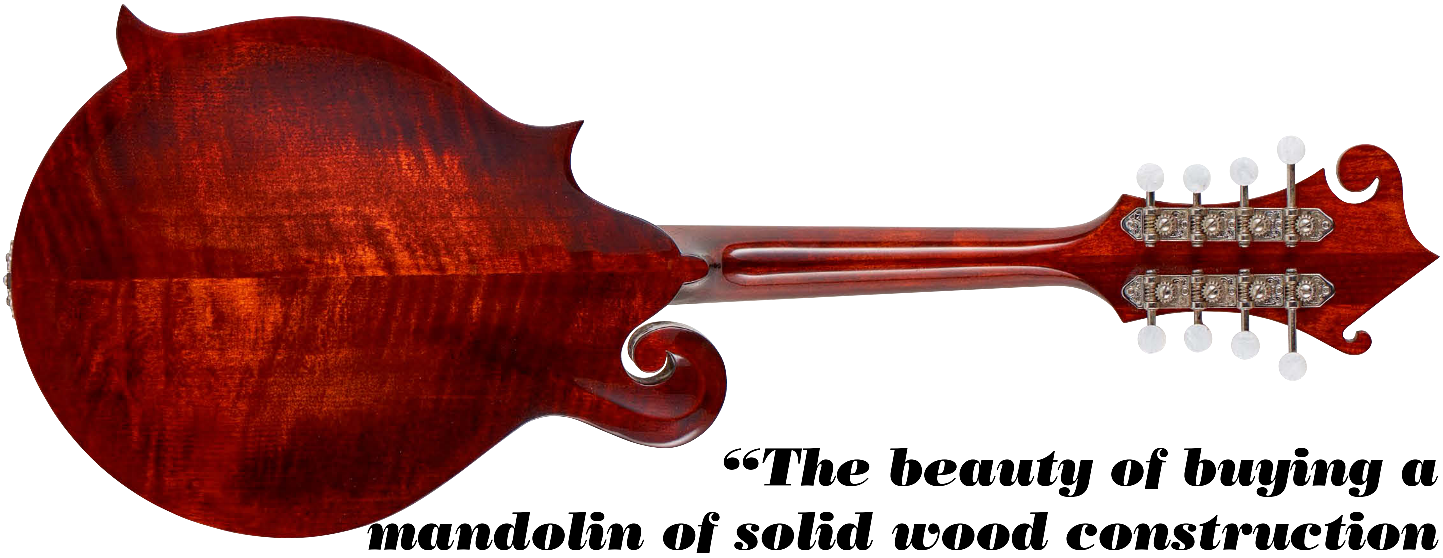


"The beauty of buying a mandolin of solid wood construction is that it's only going to improve"

EASTMAN
MD515 CLASSIC MANDOLIN

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Eastman
Model: MD515 Classic Mandolin
RRP: £979
Made In: China
Top: Carved solid spruce
Back and Sides: Maple
Bridge: Ebony
Neck: Maple
Fingerboard: Ebony
Scale Length: 13-7/8"
Nut Width: 1-3/32"
Tuners: Chrome
Electronics: None
Strings: D'Addario J74 strings
Gig Bag/Case Included: Yes, hard case

TEST RESULTS

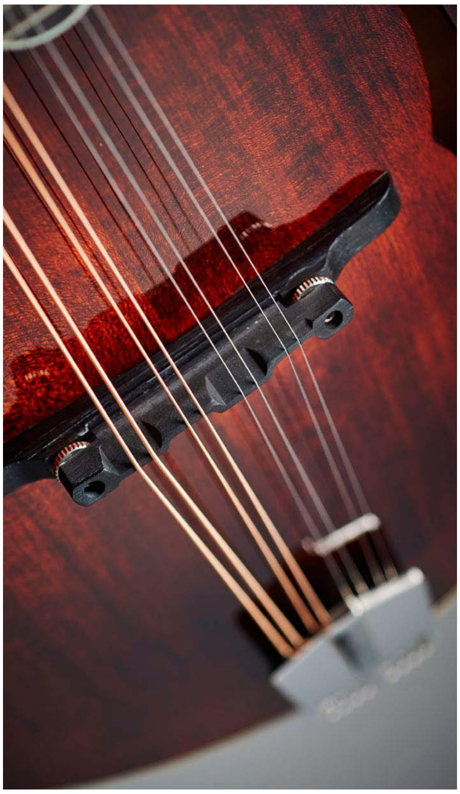
Pros: Plays great, neatly made with a high quality finish
Cons: Slightly constrained in the low register but this should improve with maturity
Overall: Worthy contender in the price range

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ★★★★☆
Sound Quality: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★☆

CONTACT DETAILS

www.eastmanguitars.com



within and would love to meet it again in a couple of years' time after it's been sold and played a lot. The beauty of buying a mandolin of solid wood construction is that, in the vast majority of cases, it is only going to improve, and I would fully expect this to become an even more impressive instrument when it's matured a little.

Sitting in the middle of the Eastman range with an RRP of £979, this mandolin seems like a very attractive proposition for anyone looking in this price range.

You'll wind up paying over twice as much for the top of the range Eastman MD915, and yes, of course it will be better appointed: a bit of gold plating knocking around, more highly figured maple, real wood binding rather than ivoroid composite, and so on. But remember, these are not things that affect the tone quality, and while the 515's cosmetics are lifted a little by the bound fingerboard, it still enjoys a simple, understated beauty characteristic of all the Eastman range – and that won't go out of fashion.

Competition is strong in this section of the market, but this is well worth inclusion on anyone's short list. Do remember that, because of the solid wood construction, tonal qualities will vary from one example to another, so if possible try before you buy. ■

Nashville thought Hank Williams was trouble.
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A.J. LUCAS PERGOLA

Do world class guitars come out of Lincolnshire? Yew better believe it…

WORDS: JOEL MCIVER **IMAGES:** JOBY SESSIONS

Lincoln-based luthier Adrian Lucas has been building guitars (plus the occasional mandolin and bass) since 1990, and has spent the intervening 26 years honing his skills to a fine degree, judging by this splendid example of his work. Take this Pergola – a no-cutaway, shorter-scale variant of the normal Pergola design – from its hard case and you'll be drooling instantly, as you'd expect for the princely sum of £2500. But is such a petite instrument worth its wince-making pricetag? Let's find out.

Usually our review guitars arrive tuned to E or D, but the Pergola – quite sensibly, in view of the neck-warping effect that courier transit can have on fully-tuned guitars – is strung completely slack out of the box. No problem, let's get those crisp-sounding Newtone 12 to 53s tuned up: it's the only real way to evaluate the machine heads, after all.

You can't fault these heavy gold Gotoh 510 units: solid as a rock but responsive, they allow us to get tuned and ready to roll with no complaints.

While we're gazing at the head end, thumbs up to Lucas for that sleek headstock design: more than a few acoustic luthiers are beginning to opt for a small head as a nod to the ease of use and effortless balance that is common in electric-guitar world. The neck is also a thing of beauty, neither finished too stickily or too slippery for expression. That said, there are only 12 accessible frets, so don't expect to barre any chords with comfort above C on the bottom E string, unless you have the hands of a marmoset.

As you'd justifiably expect for this outlay, the Pergola is all about detail, from the hand-signed and numbered certificate inside the body to the slick plastic sheet which functions as a scratchplate. There's a (presumably fortuitous) streak of blonde along the laburnum fingerboard, just underneath the top E string; as well as looking attractive, it serves a purpose in that it delineates the lower edge of the neck.

"Don't be shy: give it some serious downpicking force and the instrument will reward you with phenomenal sustain and clarity"

Is anything missing? Well, there are no strap buttons, which won't be an issue if you're planning to play the Pergola seated. If you need them, get Lucas to install them. You wouldn't try it yourself, with that old Black & Decker drill… would you? And obviously this guitar is not equipped with a pickup or preamp: I would love to have tried it plugged in, but no matter – its acoustic tone is splendiferous anyway.

The combination of tonewoods here, as well as the excellent build quality, lies at the core of the Pergola's performance. The body is a combination of walnut, laminated with oak, topped with spruce and decorated with a yew rosette. That's a resonant chunk of forest, right there: the dense walnut in particular lends the tone a depth that is both needed and appreciated in a guitar body of this size. The clean, clear spruce tone that you're already familiar with if you're reading *Acoustic* gives the Pergola a glassy, cutting top end that rounds off the overall range beautifully.

As for the laburnum bridge and fingerboard, you may not have considered this wood in much detail before (although don't those dangly yellow flowers look nice in the garden?) but rest assured it's hard, tactile and visually attractive in use. Lucas's bridge design is particularly successful, combining a remarkably slick design with functional operation.

You'll notice that the Pergola responds especially well to fingerpicking, especially at the top end, where a hamfisted pluck of the top E or B will result in a volume spike if you're not careful. It's a user-friendly instrument, though, and in line with its thoroughbred heritage will react well to careful handling. Tune down to drop D and you'll enjoy the full, resonant tone and feel of the bottom E string: go to straight D (those Gotohs really are a pleasure to tweak) and the Pergola's lower frequencies

"For a smaller guitar, it supplies a surprising amount of volume"

come to life. For a smaller guitar, it supplies a surprising amount of volume, as you'll see if you give it a strum. Don't be shy: give it some serious downpicking force and the instrument will reward you with phenomenal sustain and clarity. In a small room, those missing electronics won't seem necessary after all.

Try DADGAD for the full folk experience (we admit, an onboard tuner would have come in handy here) and you'll be provided with a warm drone from all those D notes, emanating from the soundhole with clarity and rewarding your 'folk-baroque' (© Davey Graham, RIP) fingerstyle with a rich,

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"Some serious design expertise has clearly gone into the concept of the body"

A.J. LUCAS
PERGOLA

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: A.J. Lucas
Model: Pergola
RRP: £2500
Body Size: Grand Concert
Made In: UK
Top: European spruce, yew rosette
Back and Sides: English walnut, laminated to double thickness with inner lamination of oak
Bridge: Lucas
Neck: Reclaimed Honduras mahogany
Fingerboard: Laburnum
Frets: 20
Tuners: Gotoh 510
Nut Width: 45mm
Scale Length: 24.9"/632mm
Onboard Electrics: None
Strings Fitted: Newtone 12-52 Phosphor Bronze
Gig Bag/Case Included: Hiscox hard case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Punches above its weight in tone and volume; exquisite build
Cons: No strap buttons... okay, it's a minor point
Overall: Utterly beautiful example of guitar craftsmanship

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ✪✪✪✪✪
Sound Quality: ✪✪✪✪✪
Overall: ✪✪✪✪✪

CONTACT DETAILS

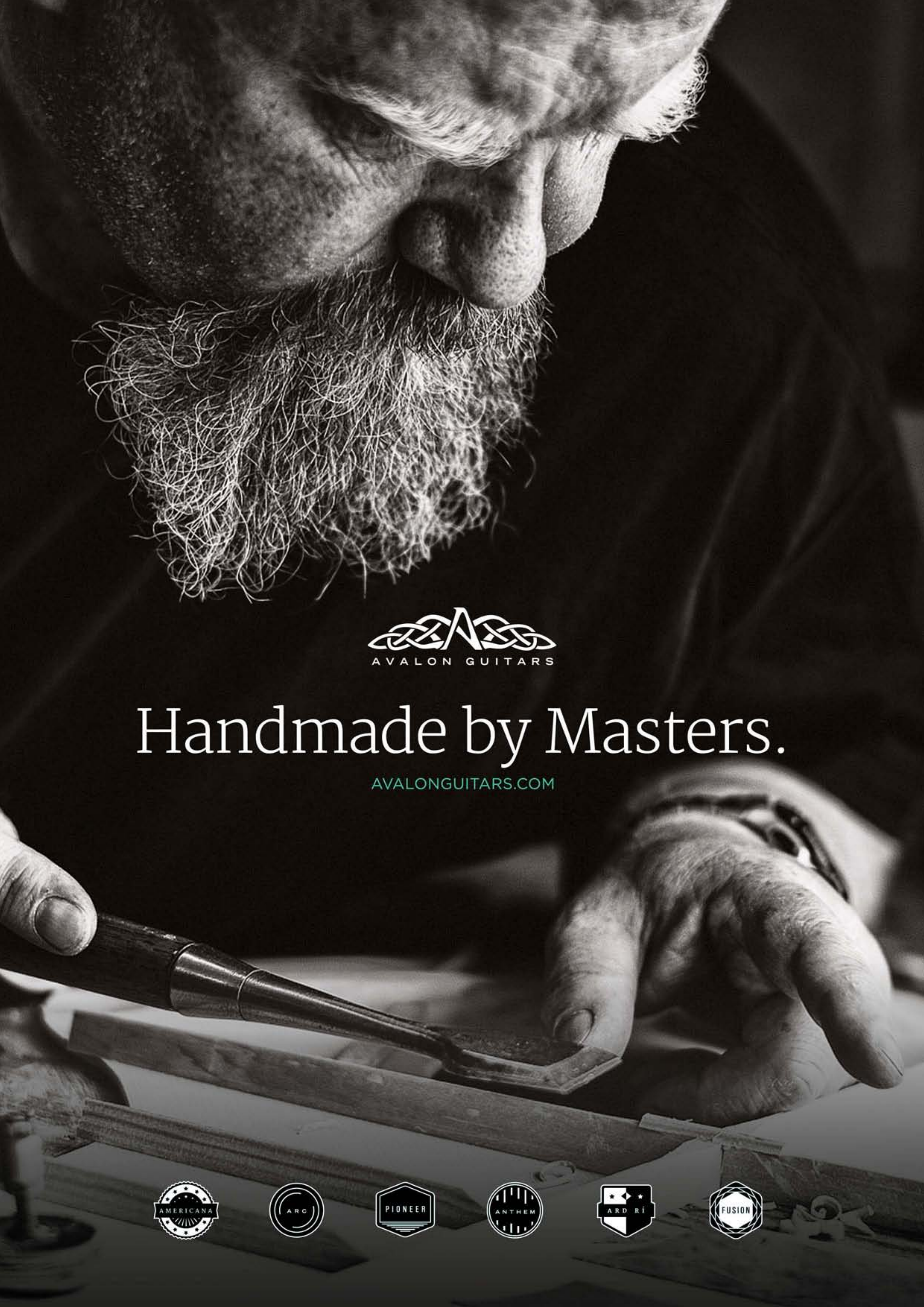
www.lucasguitars.com

full tone. If you feel the urge to cross the Atlantic, add a capo at the third fret and indulge in some James Taylor-style country-rock whimsy, that recognisable tone is easily found thanks to its compact dimensions.

Some serious design expertise has clearly gone into the concept of the body. As I mentioned before, Lucas also produce a slightly larger, 16-fret version of the Pergola with a lower cutaway, at around the same price. Performers who plan to use their Lucas live, or with more upper-register musical content, should give that variant a thorough assessment before committing. But if you plump for the one we have here, you'll be impressed by the D-shaped neck profile, whose flat (or flattish, anyway) rear surface enables and facilitates speedy barre-chord changes and provides a solid thumb platform for more delicate playing. The rounded hips at the bottom end are comfortable on the lap and unobstructive to your picking arm, too.

Like all handbuilt instruments, or indeed furniture and other wooden artefacts, there's a real sense of handmade craftmanship about the Pergola. There are no flaws in the construction that we can see or feel, so we're not talking about irregularities or errors: there's just something about the finish, which is necessarily different from a machine-made guitar. In many ways this hard-to-define quality is what you're paying all that money for, in addition to the high-quality components, of course. The Pergola gives you a very real sense that it's a one-off, just as its certificate number (125 in this case) indicates.

Our conclusion? Lucas doesn't have the biggest name in acoustic lutherie, but that means nothing when he is capable of producing instruments such as this one. This and Lucas' other guitars absolutely deserve checking out next time you're in the market for a guitar at this wallet-threatening price point. ■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FORD COLLIER

STYLE… (FOLK)

Based in mid-Somerset, I play guitar and tin whistle alongside fiddle player Alex Garden in the folk duo the Drystones. Alex and I knew each other at school, and when we were 14 and 15, my dad – who chairs Priddy Folk Festival – told me two weeks before the festival that there was a slot to be filled on the free stage. I asked Alex if he wanted to put something together, it went well and we kept playing because we enjoyed it. We're currently working on our third album, *We Happy Few*, which will feature tunes and songs from all over the place. Alex knows a lovely waltz written by Purcell called 'Hole In The Wall', which breaks up a set of two kicking Scottish reels, and in 'The Green Mountain' set, I get to play some of my favourite Irish tunes on the whistle. I write a lot of stuff on my guitar, a Takamine G-series EG523SC. It's a pretty, blonde jumbo with a cutaway, pickup under the saddle and a built-in preamp. It's not the best guitar in the world, but it's got a lovely clear, deep sound. It comes alive when I play with a plectrum, especially when flatpicking. The preamp is pretty good, and it sounds sparkly and brilliant through a PA. I'm happy with any DI a soundman gives me. I use a Boss OC-3 Super Octave pedal sparingly, and I'm about to get a Boss chromatic tuner, but generally I'm not very hot on tech. About a year ago I got a secondhand Fender F85 acoustic and a separate Fishman pickup that I can take on and off the soundhole, so I can use two tunings onstage. Alongside standard, I use DADGAD, and I find drop D handy too. Future plans? I'm in the final year of my music degree at Sheffield, so I won't have much time for gigging, but we'll be launching the new album in spring and touring it in the summer.

www.thedrystones.co.uk

KAIA KATER

STYLE…(AMERICANA)

A banjo player, singer and lyricist from Toronto, I play a mixture of Americana, jazz and blues. My songs focus on modern landscapes and people – sometimes I write about friends, history or political events, sometimes I write fiction. My new album, *Nine Pin*, was inspired by WB Yeats's poem 'Sailing to Byzantium'. The poem examines the seasons of a life, and my album explores the seasons of a young woman's 22nd year on Earth. The title track is my favourite – it's the first song I wrote for it. It's about a woman who feels like she can't keep anyone happy. She's surrounded by people, yet somehow is still lonely. The album was written, recorded and engineered in only six weeks. We got the best studio we could – Canterbury Studio in Toronto – rehearsed for two weeks, and recorded in a single day. *Nine Pin* has achieved so much for me, emotionally and musically. The only thing I would've wanted more of is time – a bit more could have allowed more small flourishes. Usually I need a quiet space and silence to write. I've never written a song before 5pm – inspiration seems to only come at night! My regular banjo is an acoustic Gold Tone Long Neck. It has three extra frets, which allows for a lower range and textures not as regularly familiar to audiences. I play through a mic, though I've been looking at getting a Schatten pickup put in. I play clawhammer style, which seems most suited to my vibe and the aesthetic of the music. I use many alternate tunings, including triple C (GCGCC), which gives it a nice drone. I also do 'last chance' tuning, where the second string is tuned to C and the fifth string to F. Currently I'm doing some writing, but mostly trying to figure out how to incorporate my percussive dancing into my live performances and study dance a bit more. I'll also be touring, with UK gigs planned for next year.

www.kaiakater.com

DAOIRI FARRELL

STYLE… (IRISH TRADITIONAL)

Based in Dublin, I used to be an electrician, but decided I wanted to study and play music full-time back in 2008 after seeing Christy Moore play on TV. I taught myself bouzouki, but I felt that it was important to study music, so I took a few years out and went to music college in Limerick. I love to sing, mainly traditional Irish songs though also occasional English, Scottish, American songs that tell a story. I play mainly traditional songs or songs written by other people. They can be old or newly composed but I sing them in my own distinct way, I think. My new album, *True Born Irishman*, is a collection of songs I have learned across my life. I love each song. I think the theme that links them all is great stories. When I sing these songs I am re-living every second of the stories in my mind. My favourite track? That's a tough one. I guess 'Pat Rainey', which was written by my friend Fergus Russell, would be up there. It's a happy song that's easy for an audience to sing along with. The bouzouki's my regular instrument – it's a great instrument for backing the songs I sing and seems to suit Irish music well. I have three bouzoukis that were made in Dublin by Joe Foley, a total master of his trade. The one I play mostly is a big-bodied spruce top made in 2014. It's a comfortable instrument to play and the sound is amazing. I like to keep the sound as acoustic-sounding as possible as I play through an LR Baggs Para Acoustic DI. I also play guitar – I own a Lowden big-bodied instrument – banjo and mandolin. Recording for *True Born Irishman* has taken up most of this year, and I'll be touring the UK in November to promote the album. I'm supporting Sharon Shannon at Ramsbottom Civic Hall on 13 November, then playing dates around the country including London, York and Durham.

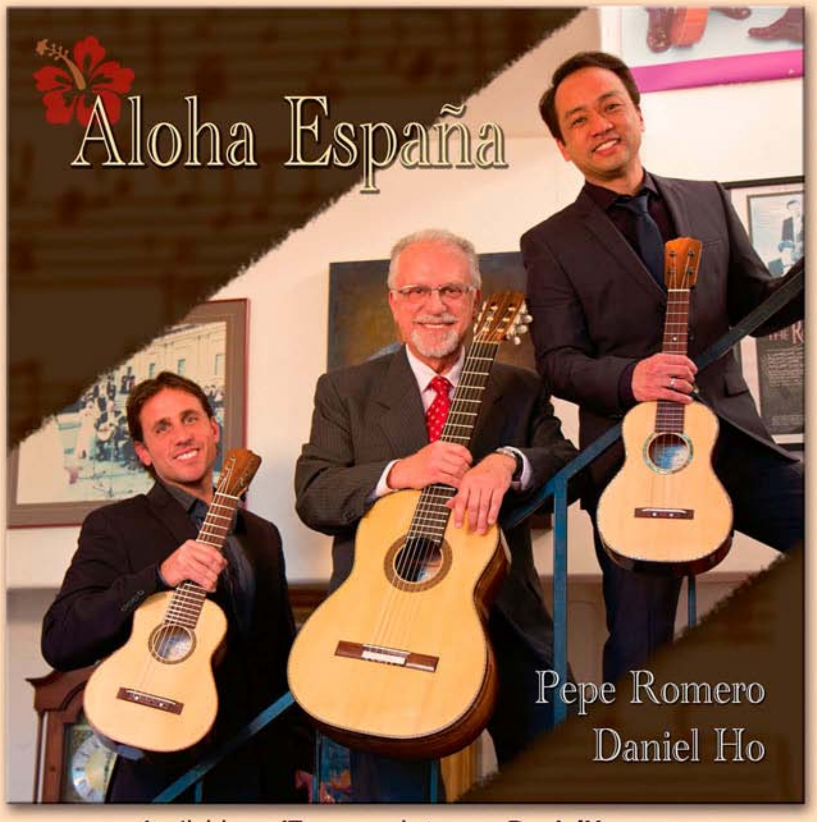
www.daoiri.com

KIT HAWES

STYLE…(BRITISH FOLK)

I'm a guitarist, mandolinist, singer and composer from Bristol. I first met my duo partner Aaron Catlow when I was playing music for a circus show with the Invisible Circus. Aaron came up after the show and asked if I wanted to join his band Sheelanagig. We both still play with the band, but this new duo allows us to try out a more intimate dynamic. We play British folk music, influenced by European and American roots music, and our songs explore current and historic events with a modern inflection. Our debut album, *The Fox*, is out in October and is a mix of traditional and self-penned songs. The title track started life as a poem in England in the 15th century, but I only ever hear it played in the US, so it was fun to bring it back over this side of the Atlantic. I find an acoustic guitar the most useful tool for writing at the moment. It has simplicity and versatility. Alternate tuning is a great way to write and explore the guitar. I mostly use C tunings: CGDGCD/CGCGCD and DADGAD. My guitar was built by Bristol-based luthier Jonny Kinkade. It's a Kingsdown 2 model, installed with an LR Baggs Anthem pickup. I also have an old Gibson ES-125 and a Phil Davidson A+ mandolin, which I love. I use a D-TAR Solstice preamp and go out to the PA from there. My mum taught me acoustic guitar from a young age. I use pick and fingers pretty equally, though fingers still feel more natural, even after 20 years' hard work with a pick. I use silk wraps on my nails, which is boring to maintain, but sounds great. From October I'll be touring *The Fox* with Aaron. Gigs include the North Dorset Folk Festival on 22 October and the Convent in Stroud on 11 December. We'll be doing a nationwide tour with Sheelanagig throughout November and December, and also working on the next duo album.

www.kithawesandaaroncatlow.com



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Variation (anonymous)
Pachelbel's Canon (Johann Pachelbel)
Amis Rondo (Daniel Ho)

Solo Guitar:
Granada (Isaac Albéniz, arr. Celedonio Romero)
Homage to the Brazilian Indians (Heitor Villa-Lobos)
Homage to High Society (Heitor Villa-Lobos)
Romance de los Pinos (Federico Moreno Torroba)

Guitar Duet:
Romance (Fernando Sor)

BEN GLOVER

THE EMIGRANT

WWW.BENGLOVER.CO.UK

'The restless nerves, the discontent, that's the curse of the emigrant,' laments Irish singer Ben Glover on the title track of his new album, 10 songs exploring problems of identity and displacement – hitting a topical nerve. In the wrong hands this might spell gloom and despair, but even when maudlin, as on Ralph McTell's 'From Claire To Here', there's a mournful grace to Glover's deep husky voice, imbuing the songs with beauty rather than the blues. 'Heart In My Hand', is a co-write with Mary Gauthier, and with its vigorously strummed acoustic and weeping fiddle it could almost be a Springsteen out-take. Soulful and thought provoking, the weaving of Irish roots and Americana is a winner. **JP**

CLIVE CARROLL

THE FURTHEST TREE

WWW.CLIVECARROLL.CO.UK

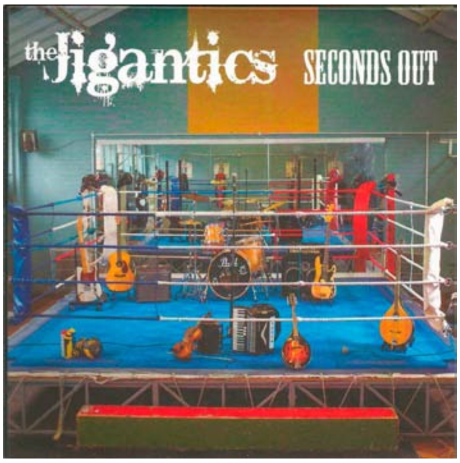
A familiar name to *Acoustic* readers, Clive toured with John Renbourn for two years, and it's the ghost of the much missed guitarist that stalks the opening instrumental 'The Abbot's Hymn', a fusion of folk, classical and blues lines, that somehow mesh into a glorious melodic suspense. An album that continually rings the changes, it's also one with a sense of fun. So a frenetic fret workout like 'The Adventures Of Wilfred', lives happily alongside the delicate pastoral beauty of 'Lady Of The Valley', or the 'Renaissance Suite', a set of five duets with John Williams. It's sensational instrumental music that knows no boundaries. **JP**

THE CADILLAC THREE

BURY ME IN MY BOOTS

WWW.THECADILLACTHREE.COM

Maybe it's the security of the familiar, but when Jaren Johnston croaks out the title song, an homage to southern culture riddled with references to blue jeans and whiskey, you can't help wondering how this stuff keeps selling albums. That said, as befits a guy who's penned monster hits for country singers like Keith Urban, Johnston's songs like 'Drunk Like You', are timeless, anthemic slices of stadium country rock. Factor in relentless, catchy chorus lines, tasteful electric guitar and Dobro, and you begin to understand why these guys are raising sand. Fine red dirt music from some good ol' boys. **JP**



THE JIGANTICS

SECONDS OUT

WWW.THEJIGANTICS.COM

Far from being yet another jig orientated outfit as the name suggests, this bunch of musicians from the Midlands handle everything from a jaunty Alison Krauss bluegrass outing to a song like the self penned pop-rock of 'Radio'. In some hands this might be a recipe for disaster, but it's a reasonable bet that these guys have been around the block a few times, and it shows in their tasteful, understated playing. On the hoary old chestnut 'The Crow On The Cradle', Marion Fleetwood's vocals are a treat, and Mark Coles' accordion and growling Dobro add spice to an intriguing mix of songs that rocket from one to another with never a hint of autopilot. **JP**

THE DEVIL MAKES THREE

REDEMPTION & RUIN

WWW.THEDEVILMAKESTHREE.COM

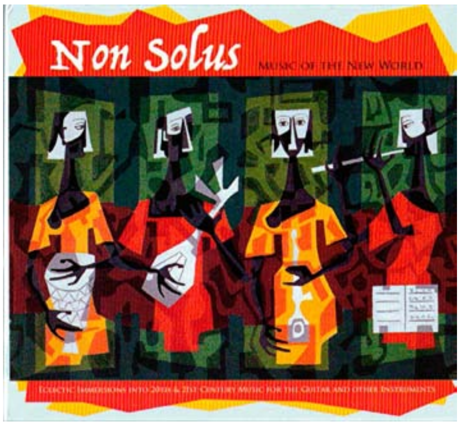
Booze, broads and blues lurk in the hellfire sphere of Americana for this trio of musicians. Songs by Kris Kristofferson, Willie Nelson and Tom Waits jostle for notice alongside cheery ditties like Townes Van Zandt's 'Waiting Around To Die' and Hank Williams' 'Angel Of Death'. So it's all depressing stuff then? Well not exactly, with Emmy Lou Harris adding some sublime harmonies here and there, and Jerry Douglas ripping off some sizzling Dobro lines. The ensemble swing like hot cats on the loose on 'I'm Gonna Get High', and beautifully ham up Robert Johnson's 'Drunken Hearted Man' with some jangling banjo. **JP**

JACKIE OATES & MEGAN HENWOOD

WINGS

WWW.MEGANHENWOOD.COM

It's intriguing to hear what the young folk milieu will come up with next. With six albums under her fiddle, Ms Oates is no stranger to clubs like Nettlebed, to which this project owes its genesis. On the unlikely choice of New Order's 'Love Vigilantes' and the gently swaying 'Bettystown', the delicate harmonies are a welcome reminder of a peaceful world, far removed from our current chaos. There are only five tracks, and when Jackie Oates' weeping fiddle introduces the final song, an inspired if mournful take of Lau's 'Ghosts', like most good things, it's all over far too quickly. **JP**



NON SOLUS

MUSIC OF THE NEW WORLD

WWW.ANTONMACHLEDER.COM

This ambitious project by Ecuadorian-born American guitarist Anton Machleder, takes the listener on a mind boggling sonic excursion, that begins with 'Histoire Du Tango', a beautifully sensual piece of sub-classical guitar penned in Buenos Aires in 1986, through to Magic Sam's 'You Belong To Me', an unlikely slice of Chicago blues written 20 years later. Stops along the way include Cuba, for the spritely 'Homenaje al Bongo Sonera', and even Miles Davis's landmark track 'All Blues'. And Anton does the whole shebang more than justice. OK, the three blues tracks, all performed with an electric band, would benefit from some grit in the tubes, but it's a masterful work. **JP**

JESS MORGAN

EDISON GLORIETTE

WWW.JESSMORGAN.COM

It seems log cabins are certainly coming into their own as recording studios these days. Jess Morgan's cabin is located on a quiet fjord near Bergen, and from the opening bars of the wheezing harmonica and soft acoustic guitar that introduce 'The Longest Arm', a tale of a man and a waitress, the peaceful ambience is almost deafening. Jess' vocals drip over her songs in the manner of Rickie Lee Jones, a little girl lost voice that at times almost falters at the end of her lines, you find yourself subconsciously just willing her to succeed. It's all very restrained, rather sweet and with no shortage of sincerity on view. **JP**

JOHN PRINE

FOR BETTER, OR WORSE

WWW.JOHNPRINE.NET

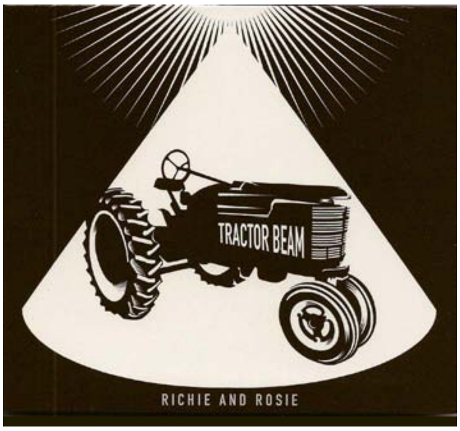
Venerated by Dylan and Presley, John Prine is about the last man standing in a line of great American troubadours. With one foot always firmly entrenched in country, a genre where duets traditionally embrace truck stop romances and heartbreak anthems, Prine romps through 14 duets, some predictable – Alison Krauss saintly whispering 'Falling In Love Again' – to the unlikely – blues diva Susan Tedeschi getting all lonely street on 'Color Of The Blues'. And just in case you're thinking this is all pathos, Iris Dement joins him for the hilarious 'Who's Gonna Take The Garbage Out', surely the best divorce song to hit since Dolly Parton… **JP**

ANDY WHITE

IMAGINARY LOVERS

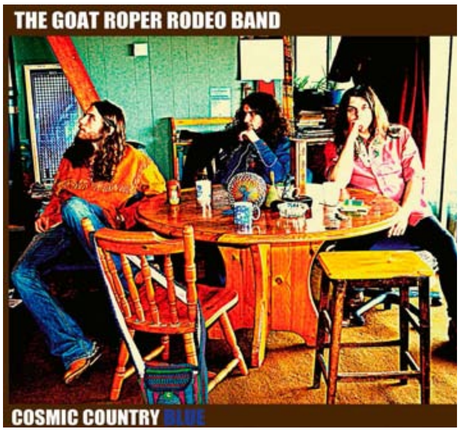
WWW.ANDYWHITE.COM

Drenched in misty eyed, maudlin songs of unrequited love and dashed dreams, Belfast troubadour Andy White certainly bares his soul on his 12th studio album. A man who's been around the block a few times – certainly on the evidence of these songs – the pervading feel is the loneliness of the long distance solo singer. Andy sings about 'standing in the rain', being told to get lost and 'counting down the hours till I see you again.' But it's not all gloom. Andy has a knack of coming up with great tunes, often verging on finger clicking pop, and there are catchy hooks all over the place. **JP**



RICHIE & ROSIE
TRACTOR BEAM
WWW.RICHIEANDROSIE.COM

Rosie Newton and Richie Stearns aren't doing anything new – old timey banjo and fiddle music, earthy and grit filled – but the energy this pair create on a stomping breakdown like 'Take It Or Leave It', threatens your speaker cones with terminal meltdown. Rosie's fiddle has a rasping Louisiana Cajun feel, conjuring up musty memories of cypress swamps and stale Arbita beer on a Sunday morning. The pair harmonise mournfully on Townes Van Zandt's wonderful 'If I Needed You', quickly tearing up the rugs again on the traditional fiddle stomps like 'Shirt Tail Boogie' and a cracking demented take of 'Trouble In Mind'. If you like this stuff, in truth it probably doesn't get much better. **JP**

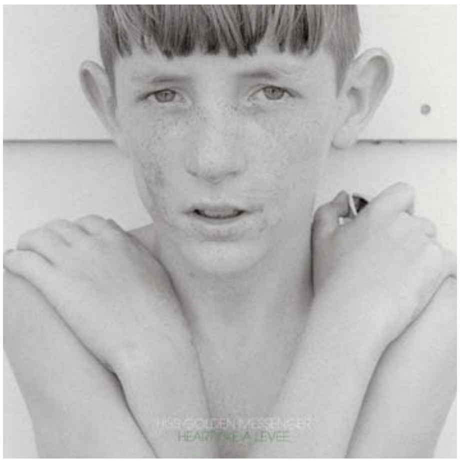


THE GOAT ROPER RODEO BAND
COSMIC COUNTRY BLUE
WWW.GOATROPERODEOBAND.COM

With fringed jackets and shirts, these guys look like they just crawled out of Laurel Canyon c.1971, but in fact gestated in a weather-beaten showman's caravan in North Wales. With Romeo Stodart (the Magic Numbers) as producer, two guitars, an acoustic bass and not much else, the GRRB's weave a wacky path between Pokey LaFarge and the Everly Brothers. On the barn-burning 'Mean Man' the guys work up a sweat, but as 'My Sweet Woman' proves, they're equally capable of some soppiness. There's a great analogue feel to it, but like Pokey, the perpetual whining is something you'll love or hate. **JP**

RUTH THEODORE
CACTACUS
WWW.RUTHTHEODORE.COM

With Ani DiFranco's producer Todd Sickafoose on board, and Ruth employing her unconventional guitar tunings, there's more than a whiff of Ms Franco around this album. Her pleading delivery of 'You Can't Help Who You Love', is wonderful stuff, Ruth's vocals dripping over a crazy syncopated rhythm of sparse acoustic guitar and drums. From the driving 'Scavengers' through to the wacky 'Man Of The Land', a song that centres around an unusual guitar line, before the lady drops back into a beguiling, whispered confidential, this is an album that just never stops coming up with the unexpected. And that's no bad thing. **JP**

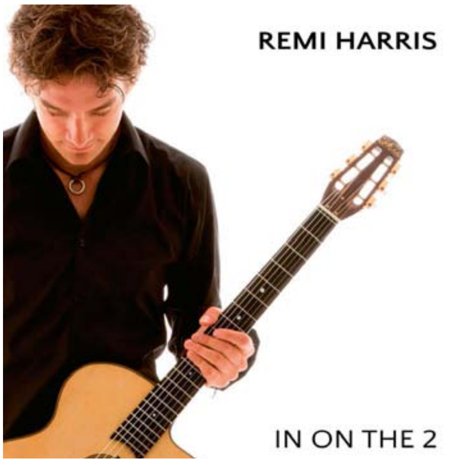


HISS GOLDEN MESSENGER
HEART LIKE A LEVEE
WWW.HISSGOLDENMESSENGER.COM

'I wasn't lonely, I just liked being alone', MC Taylor sings on 'Biloxi', the opening track of his confessional seventh album, a release that grabs you by the throat and defies you to quit listening. Taylor's loosely strummed acoustic guitar introduces the title track, gently teasing into life a song of hope and redemption. His vocals shine over the sparse arrangements, Tift Merritt weighing in with soulful harmonies on songs like the gloriously loping 'Cracked Windshield', something that might be an out take from Neil Young's glory days. **JP**

JACK WHITE
ACOUSTIC RECORDINGS 1998 – 2016
WWW.THIRDMANRECORDS.COM

Jack White's music has always been grounded in his love of acoustic music, and these 26 tracks lay the man's muse bare. It's easy to imagine young Jack singing one of his early songs like 'I'm Bound To Pack It Up' at your local open mic session, but when Meg gets hammering on 'Hotel Yorba', everything begins to come into focus. And two things quickly become apparent. Firstly Jack White is a superb songsmith, capable of penning dark lyrics as easily as the flim flam of 'Sugar Never Tasted So Good', and secondly when you hear the country honk of 'Entitlement', you know this story could go any way and still has a long way to run. **JP**



REMI HARRIS
IN ON THE 2
WWW.YARDBIRDARTS.COM

Ridiculous is about the only adjective that seems to fit Remi Harris's stupendous acoustic playing – the warp speed runs on 'Cherokee' are guaranteed to knock you sideways. And although grounded in gypsy jazz – he's starred in the 2015 Jazz Awards – on his second album Remi steps out to show he can handle just about anything he chooses. Accompanied by Mike Green on double bass, Remi turns in one stupendous instrumental after another; a slice of New Orleans funk on the Meters' 'Cissy Strut', a smoky take on Thelonius Monk's 'Round Midnight', and if Joe Pass is listening, he'll surely smile when he hears 'Have You Met Miss Jones?'. **JP**

SANTA CRUZ GUITAR COMPANY FTC

Santa Cruz Guitar Company's Richard Hoover tells us the story of the 12 new FTC guitars being built to commemorate the company's 40th anniversary, and why that original guitar – with a famous fan – was a tipping point for his company

WORDS: ALISON RICHTER

Forty years ago, during the pre-internet/social media dark ages, musicians learned about new gear by reading magazines. When manufacturers released a product, they spent a tidy-sized sum on an ad and hoped readers would notice.

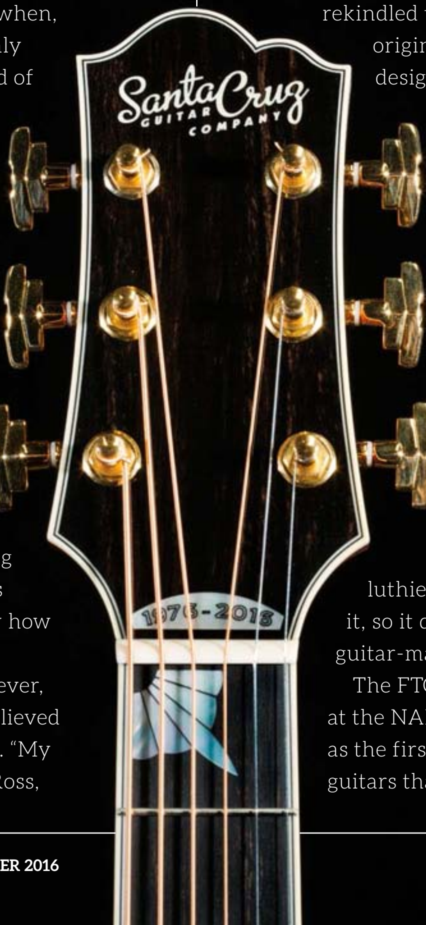
So it was for Santa Cruz Guitar Company, who made their debut in 1976. Three years later they introduced a unique model, the FTC, to little public fanfare or understanding of its unconventional design. To get the word out, SCGC bought what company founder Richard Hoover describes as "an ad about the size of four postage stamps" in *Frets* magazine, noting that it was "a big deal at the time to pull that off," given that the company was nowhere near making a dent in the guitar market, much less turning a profit.

Imagine SCGC's surprise when, in 1980, Eric Clapton not only read the ad, which consisted of a picture of the guitar and the company's mailing address, but in turn sent a handwritten letter requesting a meeting about the custom-built instrument, which he subsequently ordered. That purchase, says Hoover, was "a real tipping point for us. There's no one thing that I would ascribe to our success, but without that, we might not be having this conversation. It gave us credibility that I don't know how else we would have gotten."

To Hoover's dismay, however, the FTC didn't take off. "I believed in that instrument," he says. "My partner at the time, Bruce Ross, was instrumental in the design because he was a classical and jazz player and really motivated to do that guitar. It was the most unique thing we've done, it was new in the marketplace, and unfortunately nobody got it, so we eventually dropped it from the catalogue."

Over the years, SCGC restored Clapton's FTC twice: once in 1982, when they reset the neck angle and made adjustments to the guitar, and again in 2010, when the instrument needed a full retop, refinish, a new neck, components, and parts [see *Acoustic 104* for details]. The second restoration was an undertaking, but it served to reignite Hoover's passion and became the impetus for the guitar's 2016 comeback.

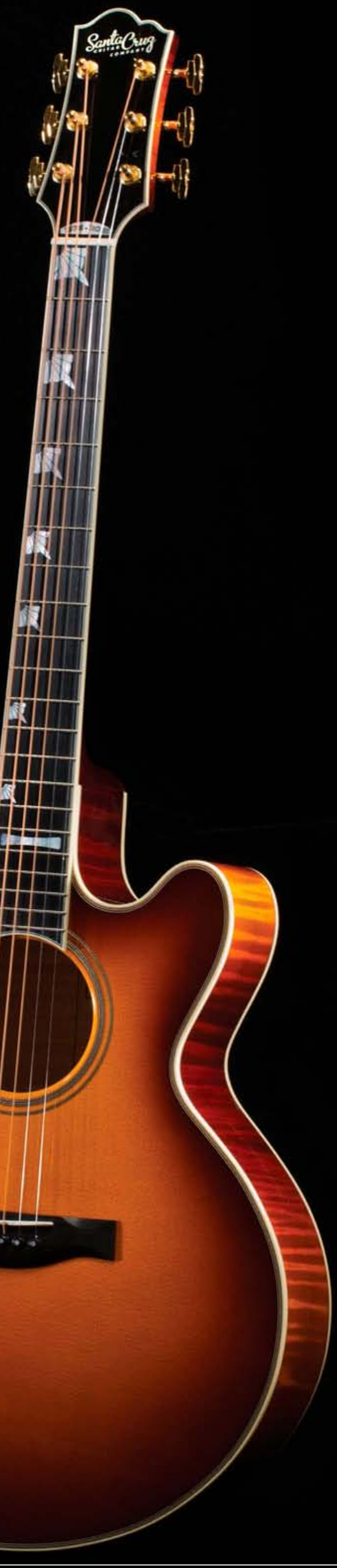
"The ember never was extinguished," he says. "I love this guitar. [The restoration] rekindled the emotion, the original feelings of the design and breakthroughs, and I couldn't wait. There was a lot of challenge in doing this guitar. The back is unlike a conventional steel string. It's not braced into a shape; it's carved like a cello back, and that requires a lot of dedicated time. Some of it needs my specific talents, or one of my senior luthiers' specific talents, to do it, so it doesn't flow through the guitar-making process."



The FTC 2016 was showcased at the NAMM show in January as the first of 12 limited-edition guitars that will vary in tone wood and finish. SCGC worked diligently in the past and now to ensure that the body shape, cutaway, peghead, and inlays all worked in unison, says Hoover. "They weren't separate components that we just put together. It's something that evokes a feeling, an era, and a style of music. Although I would do some things differently now, and I think I could refine it, it works. It's striking, and I think that's what Eric Clapton saw in the tiny ad."

With 16 luthiers on staff, SCGC averages 500 hand-built guitars annually. The plan was to release one FTC per month through 2016, but the design challenges delayed that schedule just a bit. "We've done loyal reproductions of maple, and we've made some dramatic changes in the structure of the guitar to make it more resonant but at the same time more durable," says Hoover. "The guitar still looks the same, but we added modern techniques. I've always wanted to do this guitar with a mahogany carved back – that was my whimsy, and we've done a few of those as well. We listened to the mahogany and maple side by side, and everything else being the same, you could hear the difference in tone, which is bright or dark, not bass or treble. The maple was more clean, clear, and articulate, while the mahogany was more friendly and a little warmer. There's no better or worse, just different, so there's a distinct choice between instruments. We will probably make them out of other woods, but so far we've stuck to these two woods for this run of 12."

Hoover describes the FTC as "a hybrid of two different instruments," morphing a conventional steel string guitar with an archtop, and creating a combination of sustain and "shockingly loud and direct" projection. He likens building it to "making a bowling ball in a tennis racket factory. It doesn't fit in any of our stations, so it



requires a lot of expertise and a lot of lutherie. It doesn't go in a straight line, it doesn't go efficiently, and one may actually leapfrog over the other as we get a chance to work with it. The maple is beautiful, but bending it into a cutaway might not be possible. We do it anyway. If we break a set of sides and have to go back and bend again, the one made out of mahogany might go ahead of it. Right now we have five complete, and we need to get seven of them done before the end of the year. It's not rushing; it's prioritising."

He would like to bring the FTC back as a regular part of the SCGC catalogue. "It's a shameless tease in the marketplace to do 12 of these, have them exclusive, and have people pay attention and talk about it enough that we can lay the foundation that will make it sustainable as a model," he says. "Then we can invest more time, training, and expertise to be able to do it more efficiently, so it doesn't have to be priced like a total custom one-of-a-kind guitar. I don't mean to sound boastful, but as far as the design and outcome of that instrument, I would be delighted to put it in the presence of anything made in the world today and have people truly understand what we do as a team.

"People rightly confuse us with a factory, or a smaller factory, but the truth is we're a custom shop, and this is the epitome of what we do. I couldn't show it off enough. It's not a quantity issue. It's that it's taken seriously and people understand it. That's one of the challenges for artists no matter what they do – some of the work they're most invested in emotionally and physically, they're worried people don't quite get, and that's the case with this guitar."

Building the FTC in the 1970s was a gutsy move – even more so for a fledgling company. Forty years later, however, SCGC is an industry leader, and the relaunch is yielding much different results.

"If I may say so, we are a very credible voice in steel string guitars," says Hoover. "We have the attention of the largest companies on Earth that want to know how to take what we have and scale it into mass production, so when we do something new, people are watching. Therefore, we have the intention and the audience for people to look at this guitar anew, and they believe we'll do something worthwhile. When we introduce a new model, there's substance to it. That's our reputation. People had a willingness to look at this guitar, and a lot of them didn't know its history. The opinion leaders who believe in us wanted it as soon as we announced it, because they knew it would be special. They were prepared to like and accept it — just the opposite of when we did it the first time. It only took us 40 years!" ■

ROGER BUCKNALL MBE

Fylde's Roger Bucknall had a day he would never forget when he was awarded with an MBE. Richard Thomas, who knows him well, profiles the man behind the gong

WORDS: RICHARD THOMAS **IMAGES:** MIKE ENGLISH

In my time, I've worked with quite a few people who have been recognised by the honours system. I confess that I've been a little sceptical about reasons for the awards in one or two cases, but it has been obvious to me that most of the recipients of my acquaintance have been clearly deserving and have given years of outstanding service in fields like education, science and technology, and medicine or have made major contributions to the development and well-being of their local communities.

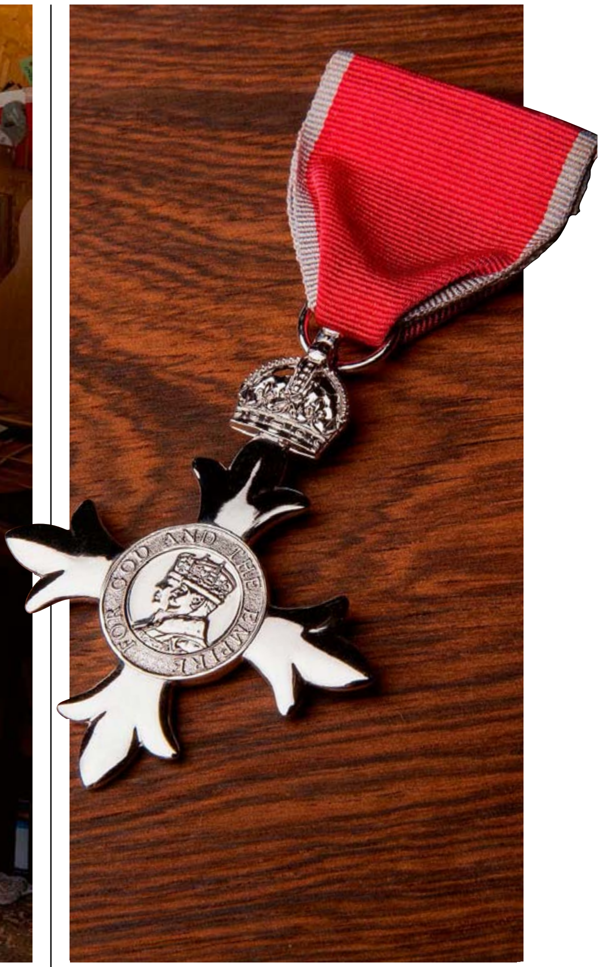
The honours system recognises people who have "made achievements in public life... [or] committed themselves to serving and helping Britain. They'll usually have made life better for other people or be outstanding at what they do."

Every year, the Queen or Prince Charles, presents these awards at Buckingham Palace to civil servants, figures in the arts and media, leaders of industry, science, education and so on. Recipients of the award are nominated by someone who is familiar with their work and nominations are considered by a committee, along with supporting evidence. The committee's recommendations are then passed to the PM and then to the Queen. The whole process is highly confidential and nominees are usually unaware that they have been nominated.

Musicians are quite frequently recognised, but not usually instrument makers. Finally, a member of the acoustic instrument community has been recognised, with the award of an MBE to Roger Bucknall of Fylde Guitars for guitar-making, music and heritage crafts. Roger's instruments are well known in the UK folk music community and beyond, and his guitars have found their way into the hands of many world famous musicians. A glance at the Fylde website reveals a long list of well-known names who are Fylde players, like Paul McCartney and Pete Townshend (who has ordered two more just recently), and keen *One Show* watchers may have spotted Fyldes being played on two separate occasions recently – by Chris Difford and John Smith, who was backing Lee Ann Rimes.

Roger first became aware of his nomination in November 2015, when a letter from the Cabinet Office arrived, informing him of his nomination and asking if he would accept the honour. After recovering from the shock, Roger did a little investigating and finally tracked

The Fylde team (left to right): Alex Reay, Paul Ferrie, Moira Bucknall and Roger Bucknall



down the originator of the nomination – Colin Henwood, of Henwood and Dean, a builder of fine wooden boats and father of singer/songwriter and Fylde player Megan Henwood. The process began 15 months previously, during which time support was sought from a wide range of people, including Roger's team at Fylde, musicians and other guitar makers.

So, on 20 May, Roger, resplendent in new suit, and accompanied by his wife, Moira, and his daughters, made his way to Buckingham Palace for a long day culminating in the presentation of the honour by Prince Charles, who chatted to him about training the people who worked for him over the years and about Roger's local pub, which was opened by His Royal Highness. Following the ceremony, Roger and family celebrated with lunch, not at The Ivy, or Simpsons in the Strand, as one might expect, but at Nando's. My daughter informs me that this is "keeping it real." I would expect nothing less from the man whose newsletter announced the award under the heading "Cantankerous old git awarded an MBE."

Despite his self-effacing and tongue-in-cheek remarks, Roger is clearly thrilled by the honour. He is the first guitar-maker to be recognised by the honours system and when I spoke to him recently, he confirmed that the award means a lot to him. Having started Fylde Guitars in 1973 and, in his own words, having had lots of "up and downs" – including bouts of ill-health – he sees the MBE as a confirmation that people can be recognised for doing something they love – in his case making superb musical instruments out of natural materials. It's a recognition of a lifetime of making things, particularly guitars, which has given him the opportunity to bring together all the things he loves: science, technology, engineering and music.

Roger has an aversion to describing himself as a luthier, preferring the term guitarmaker. He loves both machines and hand-work and describes himself as an engineer (he is a mechanical engineering graduate from the University of Nottingham) and frustrated musician. Music is still hugely important to him and he sees the use of Fylde instruments by so many musicians as enabling him, in a sense, to participate in the music. This is a strong part of what motivates him and keeps him going, he says. He still goes to live music whenever he can and continues to learn from watching musicians. Many of the people who supported his nomination for the MBE were musicians, which meant a lot to him, and helped him in his decision to accept the honour, especially as some of the musicians he respects are themselves recipients of MBEs and OBEs.

Another cause for celebration is the publication of the second edition of Roger's book, *Wood, Sweat and Tears*, a lavishly illustrated volume, which acoustic players will find fascinating. The book documents the history of Fylde, from its earliest days, looks at the instruments themselves, and at Fylde players, including contributions from Gordon Giltrap, Richard Hawley, Martin Simpson, Martin Carthy, Eric Bibb and Nic Jones, to name just a few. As well as being beautifully illustrated and highly informative, the book helps one appreciate the impact and contribution that Roger and Fylde have made to both traditional and contemporary music. Sadly, the book's publication preceded Roger's award, so it wasn't possible to include it in the book, though I suggested that perhaps it would be a good excuse for a third edition!

As I ended my recent conversation with Roger, I asked him if he really was pleased with his MBE.

"Yes," he said, "I am. But it doesn't half dig in when you turn over in bed." ■

THINKING **INSIDE** THE BOX

UK luthier Nick Benjamin explains what we're actually hearing when we pluck the strings of our guitars

WORDS & IMAGES: NICK BENJAMIN

Previously I stated that sound comes from many parts of the guitar at once, not just the soundhole. I described how the strings' vibrations are passed on to probably the most important sound producer: the soundboard. They then pass to the surrounding air to create 'sound' due to its large surface area that fan away quickly but invisibly at the air. The acoustic guitar does not simply pass on vibration but modifies the simple string vibration into the sound we think of as that of a guitar rather than a string. This is because the pieces of wood that make up a guitar are not neutral, as an ideal loud speaker cone might be, but have their own ways of vibrating added to the mix. If you just heard a completely true version of the string sound, an acoustic guitar would sound pretty boring.

Every object has a resonant frequency: the rate at which it 'likes' to vibrate. Blow a bottle-top, hit a xylophone key or pluck a string and the main part of the sound you hear is this frequency or note. What that frequency is depends on things like weight, size and stiffness. If you try to make an object vibrate at a frequency it 'likes' by feeding that frequency of vibration into the object, it will say, 'yes please!' and do so strongly. If you give it some other frequency, it may give a more half-hearted rendition or say 'no' and vibrate at a frequency it likes more instead.

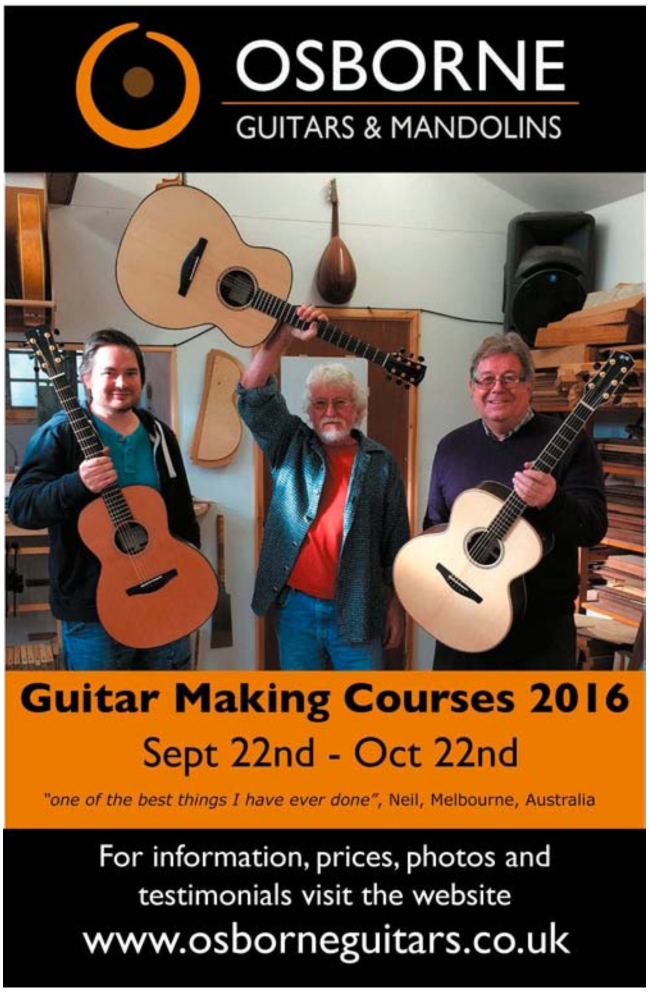
Every object has other higher frequencies alongside the main one that it will also like to vibrate at. In a simple object like a string, these are generally direct ratios called 'harmonics' that are twice as high, three times as high and so on. It is this 'harmonic series' that actually gave us musical scales. In a relatively complexly shaped object like a guitar – or its soundboard or back, or the air trapped inside its body – these harmonic frequencies will generally not be simple ratios and the vibrations will form various complex patterns across the surfaces.

The interaction between all of these many resonant frequencies of the various parts of the guitar and how they respond when fed a particular frequency or 'note' by the strings is what we mean by a guitar's 'sound' or 'response'. When you pluck a note, different parts of the guitar will be passed the vibration and respond in different ways as described above: either joining in with, ignoring or subverting the string's input. The complexity of this interaction is what adds the tonal colour or overtones that bring our sound to life. If the desired note is actually bent too much out of shape we call it a 'wolf note' and treat it as a problem rather than as a desirable quirk of a guitar's personality – I'll keep that for another article.

The lump of air inside the soundbox has a quite low main resonant frequency and when we play notes, particularly lower ones, this air is triggered off into a warm resonance (by the back of the soundboard fanning at it) that enhances the fullness of tone and feeds some of that warmth back into the way the soundboard and back are vibrating. This air resonance is what is 'coming out' of the soundhole, as well as a jumbled version of the sound radiating from the inside surfaces of the guitar. The back of the soundboard produces just as much sound as the outside surface but it radiates into the confined cavity of the soundbox. The main purpose of the soundbox and soundhole is to create this trapped lump of air with its sympathetic bass resonance and shock-absorbing squashiness that helps smooth out the tone. The soundhole allows some of the vibrational energy to escape so we can hear it, but must be small enough that the air is trapped effectively such that it is 'resonant'. Cover the soundhole with some card for an idea of this!

The back and sides respond in slightly different ways depending on thickness, tightness of curvature and strutting, and wood, but they are much like the soundboard in that they radiate sound from their surfaces but at a generally lower level. A thinner, looser back usually radiates more warm midrange tones, making the guitar appear fuller in tone to the player sitting closely behind, while a thicker, tighter back may radiate mainly higher frequencies making it appear brighter to the player.

I hope you will now be able to think about your guitar and its individual sound in a slightly different way from now on... ■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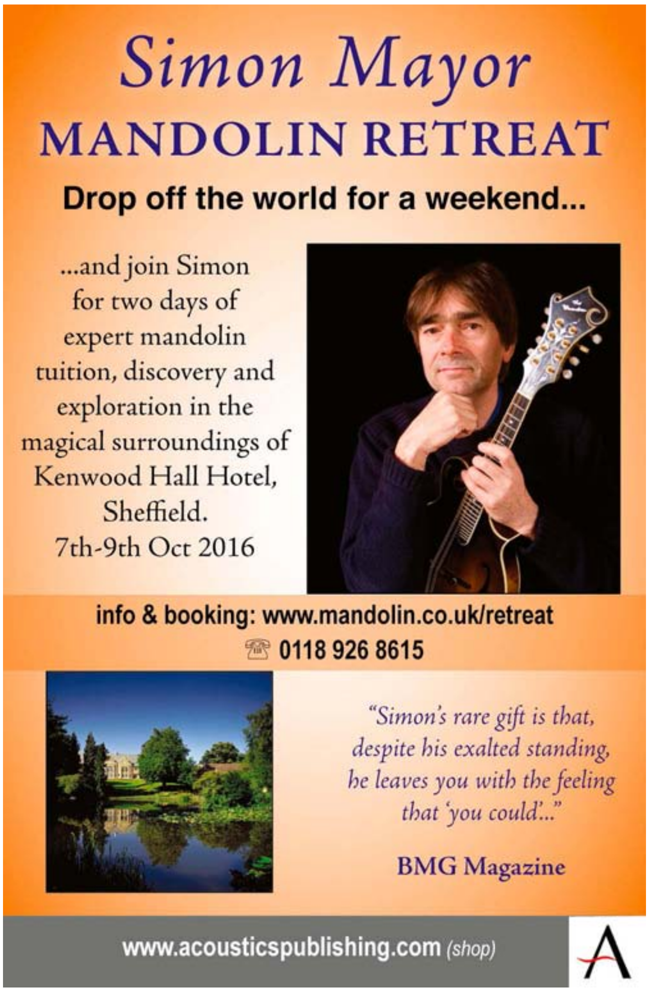
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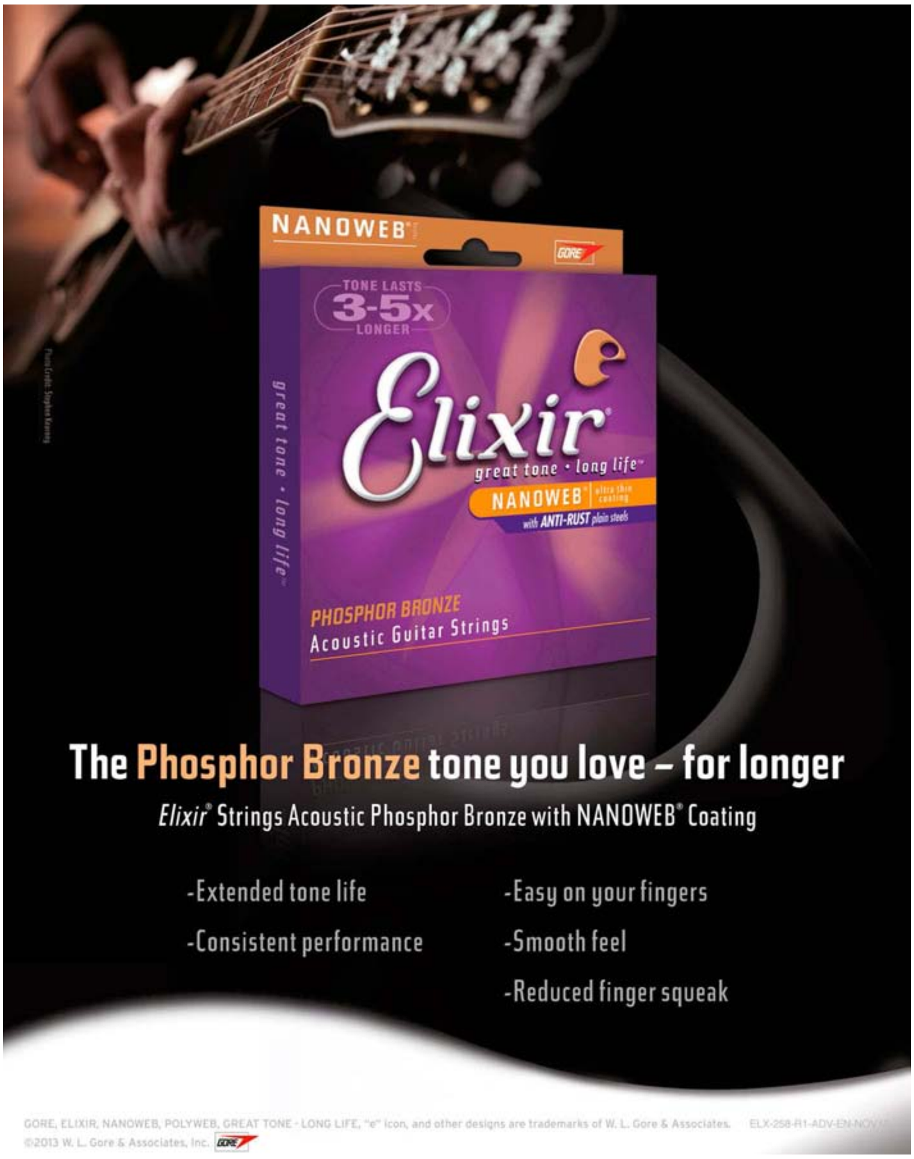

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THE SLIDE GUIDE

WEISSENBORN

Chris Eaton concludes his look at the diverse world of slide guitar: in this third part he focuses on the unique Weissenborn

In my previous feature I explored the world of square neck, lap style Dobro. Now in the final instalment of my slide guide I'm going to look at a similar yet unique lap style instrument – the Weissenborn.

Born in Germany in 1863 Herman Weissenborn moved to America in 1902. In the 1920s, partly due to the Hawaiian music boom of the time, he started producing steel guitars (so called because they're played with a steel bar). Today people still use his surname to describe 'Weissenborn style' guitars made by various manufacturers.

Originally made of koa, a Weissenborn's unique selling point is its hollow neck. This creates a bigger sound chamber than other acoustic guitars, which helps produce their signature mellow, woody tone. Weissenborns pre-date lap style resonators (Dobros and Tri-Cones) and were therefore the first commercially available lap slide instruments.

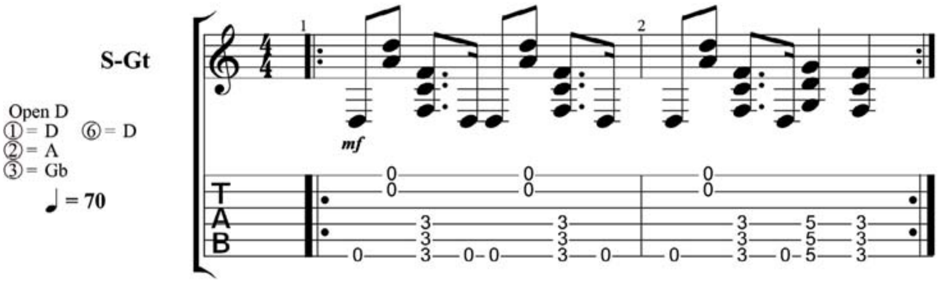
Although most high street guitar shops won't stock them, buying a Weissenborn type guitar is easily achievable online. Like with any acoustic instrument solid tone wood models are going to sound best, but laminate entry models are always available. In the UK we have our very own dedicated specialist manufacturer in Anderwood Guitars, based in Dorset. I'm playing one of their beautiful koa instruments in my video demos of this month's exercises.

Some of the more well-known contemporary Weissenborn players to check out are:

- Long-time Jackson Browne collaborator David Lindley
- Grammy award winner Ben Harper
- The late, great Bob Brozman
- The UK's own Martin Harley
- Australian folk star Jeff Lang
- Dobro master Jerry Douglas

In terms of playing techniques we use the same approach as for Dobro or lap steel. Most players use thumb/finger picks, some wear fake nails, some use only finger tips.

EXAMPLE 1



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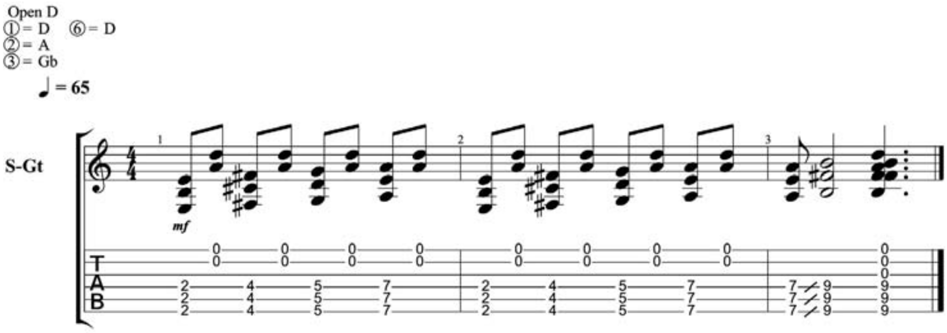

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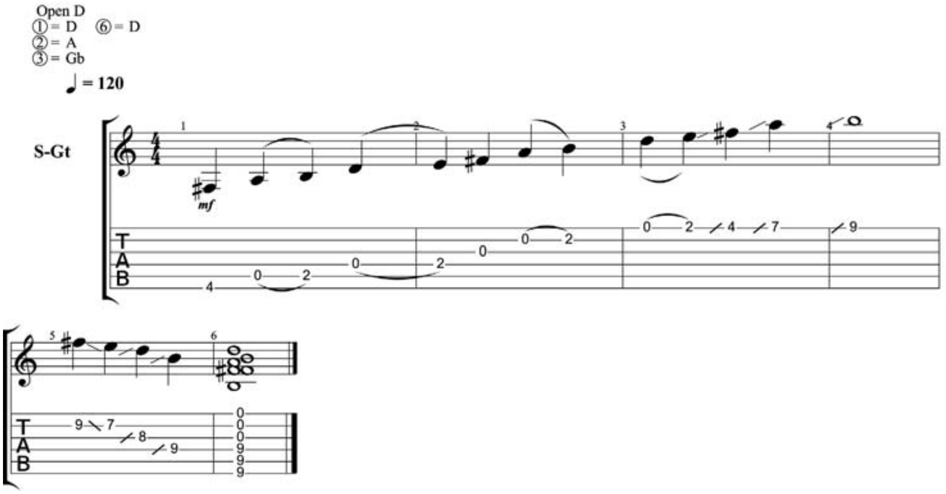

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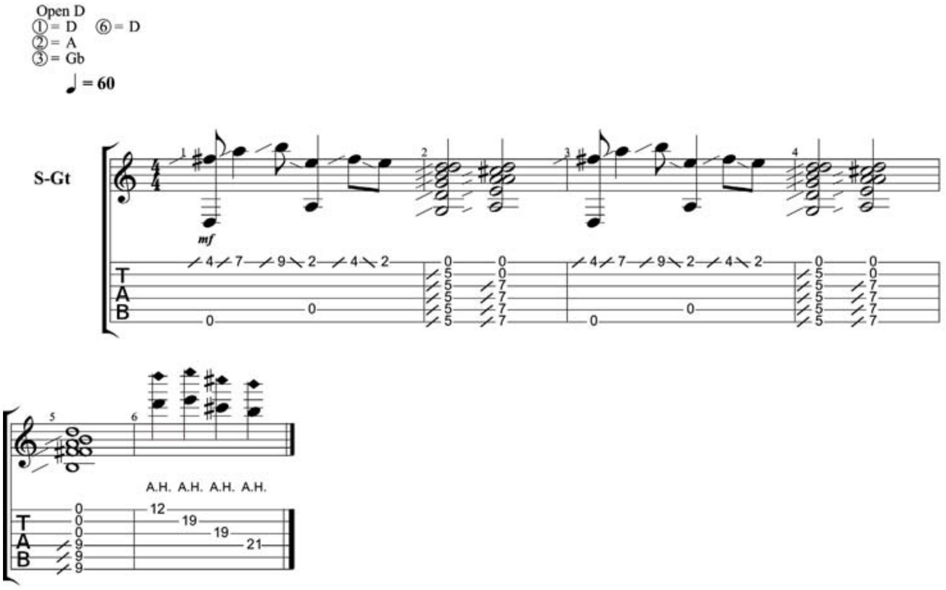


The steel bars are available in two designs – round 'bullet' bars or the contoured Stevens type, which are easier to hold and control in my opinion.

Low tunings are used to prevent damage to the instrument. Open D or C being popular favourites, with a set of 13s or 14s. As with all slide playing right hand string blocking/muting is the key to achieving a clean, controlled technique. However, simply playing in-tune is the first challenge. Your intonation will improve over time if you keep working on it.

I've written four examples for you to practice. All in open D tuning. You can see video demonstrations of each example at my website: **www.chriseatonguitar.co.uk**

EXAMPLE 1

A dirty blues groove. This is fun to play and would work well as a loop to improvise over.

EXAMPLE 2

At the ninth fret it's possible to produce the relative minor chord using a partial bar position. So this example uses this technique and moves through some of the major scale tones to conclude at the Bm.

EXAMPLE 3

Here I'm playing the Bm pentatonic scale with a lick at the end. Be sure to hammer-on the first few notes using the tip of your bar. Crossing strings cleanly requires effective string blocking with your right hand. Practise this example slowly.

EXAMPLE 4

A melodic passage using the bass strings to accompany the tune. Good intonation of the top string notes can be tricky to begin with. Again use only the tip of your bar by tilting your hand up. Then for the lush chords the bar comes down flat but doesn't cover all six strings. At the end I've included four artificial harmonics, also known as chimes. I use my right hand thumb to 'fret' the note and then pick the string with my first finger.

I hope you've found these slide guides useful. Playing guitar with a bar or bottleneck isn't easy at first but if you persevere you'll be able to play expressively in a way that's impossible on regular guitar. The key techniques with lap or bottleneck style are right hand string blocking/muting and accurate intonation with the slide. But most important of all is listening to accomplished players online or at gigs. Seek out inspiration, it's never far away. ■

THOMAS LEEB FINGERSTYLE VIRTUOSO

A PRIMER TO 'ASHA'

Thomas gets us ready to tackle his track 'Asha' with a crash course in one-handed harmonics

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: ADVANCED

Let me introduce you to one of my more laid-back tunes called 'Asha'. The melody came to me in the first days with my newborn daughter and the song bears her name. It took me a while to translate the song to the guitar but I'm very proud of the final result. You can give it a listen on YouTube: https://youtu.be/J6ZKyeSxstw.

We won't be going into depth with the song in this issue because the technique that holds the entire piece up is somewhat difficult to pick up if you have never encountered it before. On the upside, it's not rocket science either, so let's deal with the basics first. It shouldn't take you more than a few minutes to get a grip on them. First thing to note: we are in DADGAD tuning.

To start off, ignore your left hand at first and just focus on the right. In order to play a harmonic with only your right hand, touch the node point on the 12th fret (that's the number in brackets) lightly with your right-hand index finger and then pick the string with your right thumb (that's the open string next to the number in brackets). This is one of the more challenging tricks to learn, so take your time and don't let failure get you down. Tip: a little bit of thumbnail helps here.

What I find so beautiful in this technique is the constant back and forth between the pinched harmonics and a normally plucked string. The first note of **example 1** is the one-handed harmonic we just dealt with. So your thumb picks the harmonic and your pinky or ring finger will pick the open string.

Try not to move your right hand too much: it should flow from note one to the other. When you get these two balanced and bouncing back and forth, feel free to move on to **example 2**.

Now try moving exactly the same formula (alternating a harmonic with an open string) with strings four and two and then strings five and three. You simply move the pairs of strings down and back up.

Examples 1 and **2** don't really sound like much, do they? For **example 3**, pretend you fret a normal D chord in standard tuning and lift up whatever finger is on the G string. Repeat exactly what you did in **example 2** and it will sound much better.

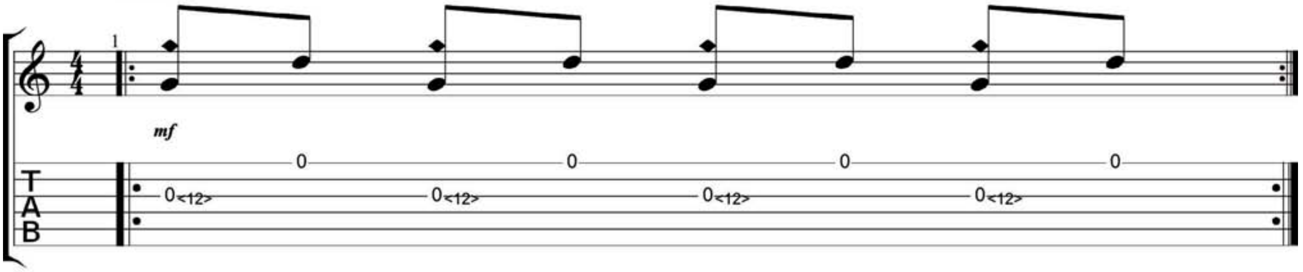
You can keep all left hand notes stationary in **example 4** while picking out the harmonics and open strings with your right. The only difference here is that not only do you move from the treble to the bass strings, you will also move up to fret 14 on the fourth string while the left hand holds down the second fret.

In **example 5** we change from the first chord to the second. I keep my ring finger on the C on the second string throughout this.

Get this technique nailed and you'll be ready to work on 'Asha', which we'll start in my next column. ■

EXAMPLE 1

Tuning: DADGAD



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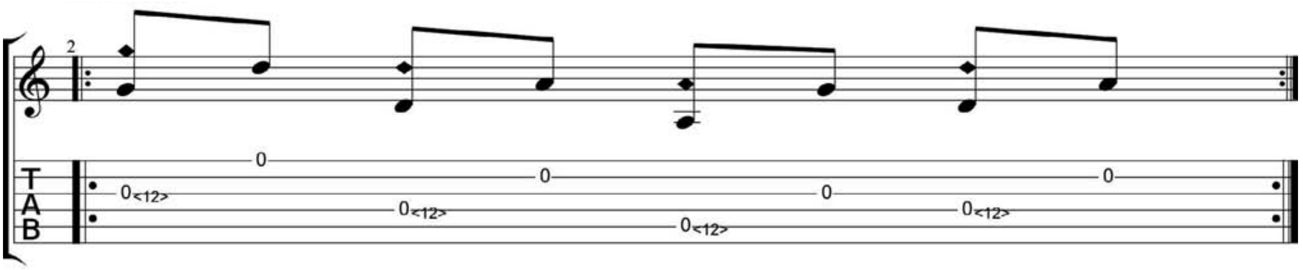

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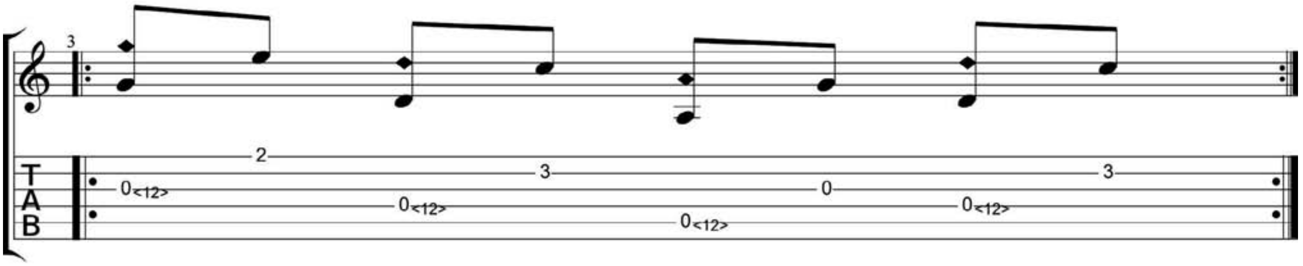

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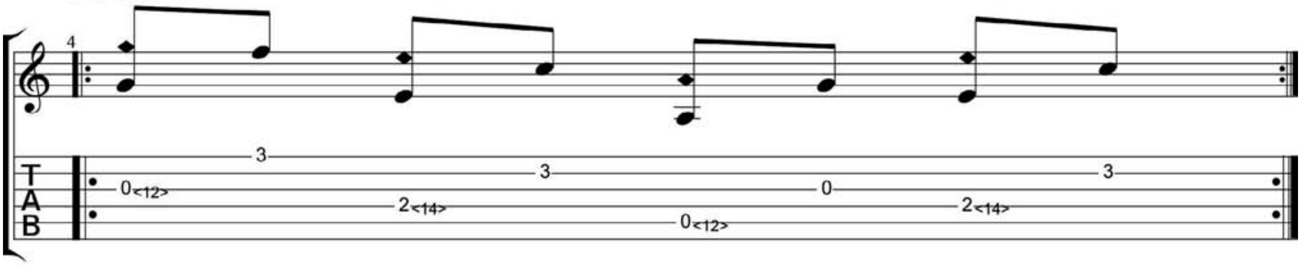
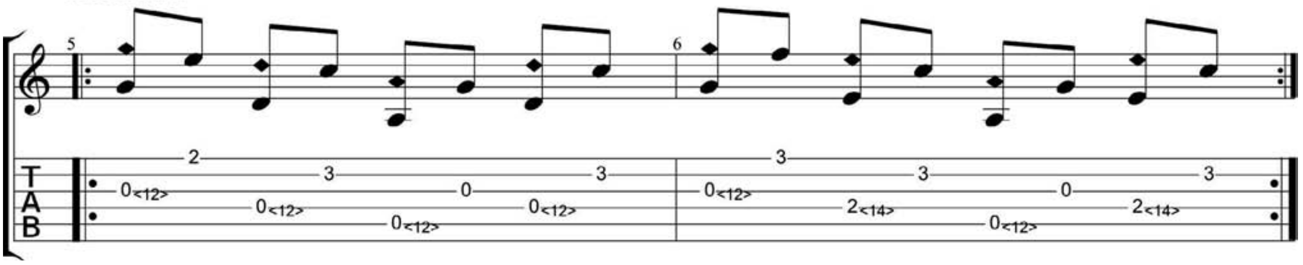


EXAMPLE 5



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DANIEL HO GRAMMY WINNING UKULELE AND SLACK KEY GUITAR PLAYER

THE ART OF ARRANGING – PART 2

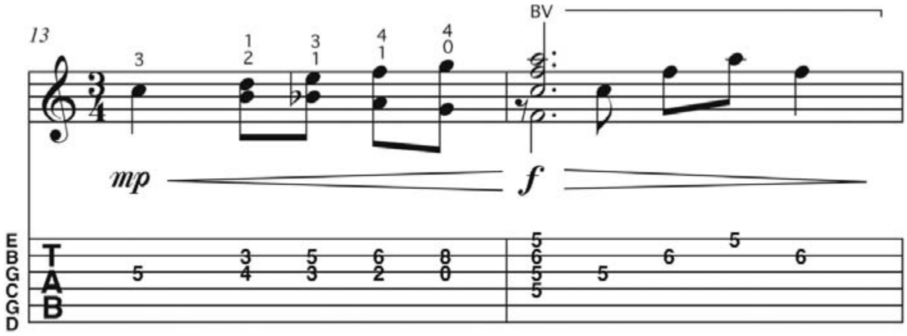
Daniel continues his series on arranging for slack key guitar

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE

In our previous column about guitar arranging, we discussed the importance of choosing a key that maximises the number of open strings available (which allows your left hand the freedom to finger additional parts), and how slack key guitar takes this concept a step further by re-tuning the instrument to pitches that allow access to even more open strings. We then explored beyond the first and second dimensions of melody and harmony to introduce a third dimension made up of three techniques: motifs, ostinatos and pedal points.

Before we warp speed into an alternate universe of atonal and polyrhythmic bliss, the final mission is to venture upon four additional techniques that will help make our arrangements innovative and unique: contrary motion, parallel motion, oblique motion, and reharmonisation.

EXAMPLE 1



CONTRARY MOTION

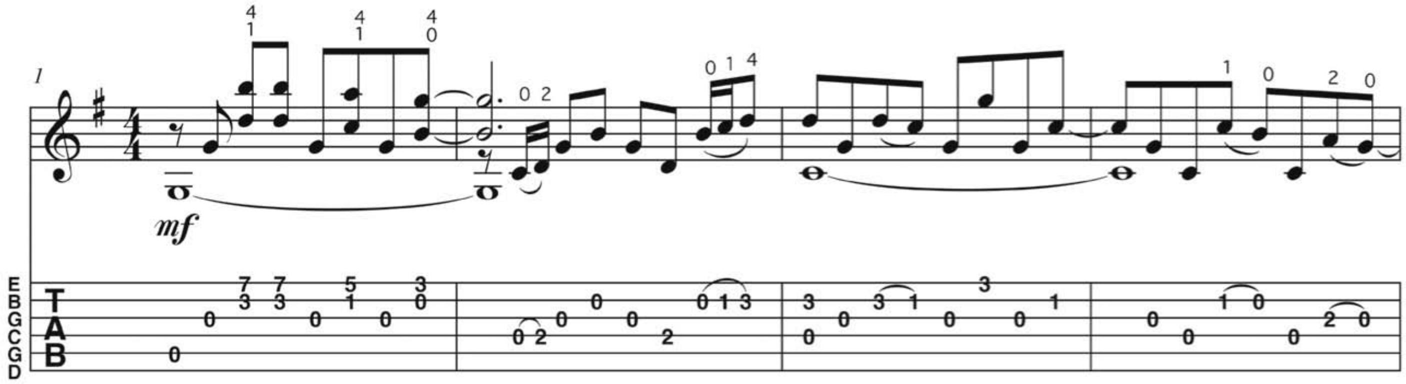
This can best be described as two musical elements that move in opposite directions. Well-suited for piano, each hand would play a separate part as they move away from each other. On guitar, only one hand (the left hand) defines the majority of the pitches, which makes this technique exceptionally challenging. It widens the range and opens up the arrangement for increased grandeur.

Example 1 is a two-bar passage of 'Hawai'i Pono'i', Hawaii's state anthem, a short example of contrary motion. I used it to build energy towards the end of the phrase.

PARALLEL MOTION

Simpler than contrary motion, parallel motion is a popular harmonisation technique on guitar. The most common intervals used in parallel are thirds, sixths, octaves, and tenths. The iconic guitar part for 'Blackbird' by the Beatles is a wonderful example of parallel motion on guitar. It functions in a supportive way by

EXAMPLE 2



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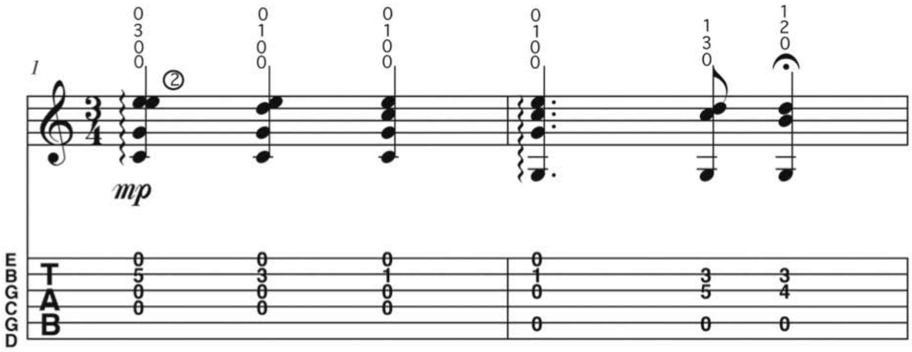

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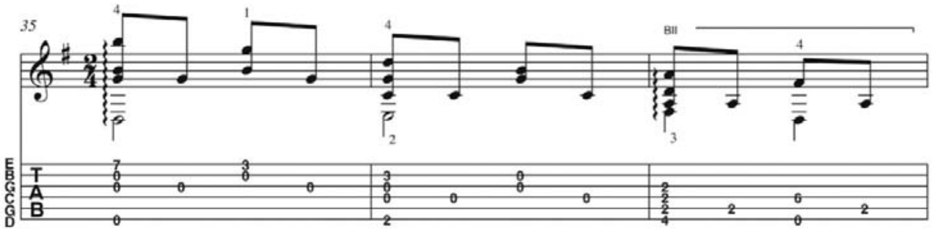
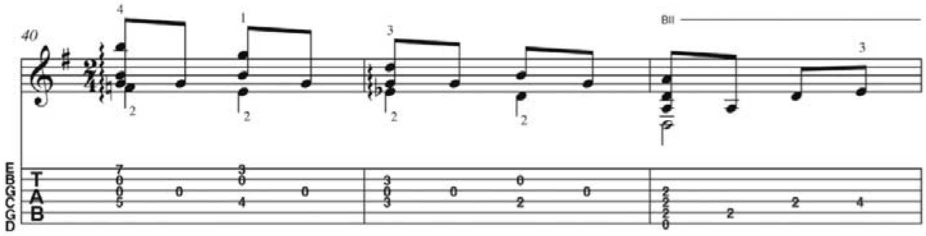


EXAMPLE 5



shadowing the movement of the melody. **Example 2** is the melody of 'Dreams of Eternity', which is harmonised with sixths, giving it fullness and bringing it to the forefront of the musical texture.

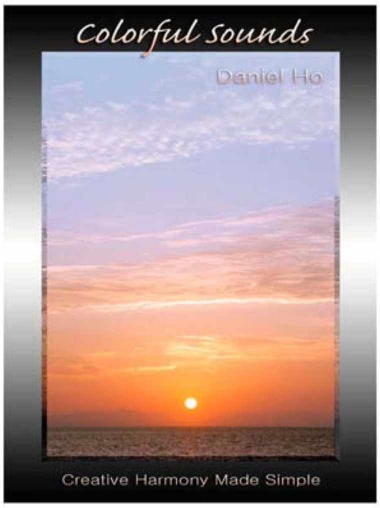
OBLIQUE MOTION

When one musical element remains constant in pitch while another moves, this is called oblique motion. It is an effective way to add interest to a static melody. For instance, vocal melodies often consist of repeated notes as lyrics are being sung. The words might retain interest because they tell a story, but instrumentally, repetition of the same note could benefit with the use of oblique motion.

I treated some of the melody in 'Hawai'i Pono'i' this way, which you can see in **example 3**. Notice how an inner voice moves downward in a stepwise motion while the melody remains constant.

REHARMONISATION

Any melody can be harmonised in numerous ways. Reharmonising a piece maintains a listener's interest by changing the relationship between the melody and its supporting harmony. An example here – the note



C would sound very different if it were harmonised with a C major triad compared to a Gbma9(+11). Because the C note is the raised 11th of the Gbma9(+11) chord, it will have a more harmonically dense sound than the C note harmonised with the C major triad. This aspect of music is particularly dear to me, and I authored a book entitled *Colorful Sounds,* which is singularly dedicated to a method of harmonisation.

An example of this can be found at the end of 'Pomaika'i' (**examples 4-5**), where the closing statement is repeated and reharmonised.

The seven techniques we have traversed in these two lessons – motifs, ostinatos, pedal points, contrary motion, parallel motion, oblique motion, and reharmonisation – are not specific to only guitar, but are widely used composing and arranging techniques in western music. They are ingeniously applied in some of my favorites, from Joseph Haydn's 'Symphony 102', to Rodgers and Hammerstein's 'The Sound Of Music', to Dave Grusin's 'Fabulous Baker Boys' soundtrack. When exploring these techniques on guitar, the deliberate use of open strings is a top priority, whether by determining a key or re-tuning. The thoughtful combination of any of these elements on guitar will result in a much richer composition, a quantum leap all your own. ■

The musical examples in this article are excerpts from the book *Slack Key Guitar: The G Kilauea Tuning*, which is available at danielho.com

CLIVE CARROLL ACOUSTIC VIRTUOSO

'STOMPIN' AT THE SAVOY'

Clive takes us through his arrangement of a jazz standard

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE

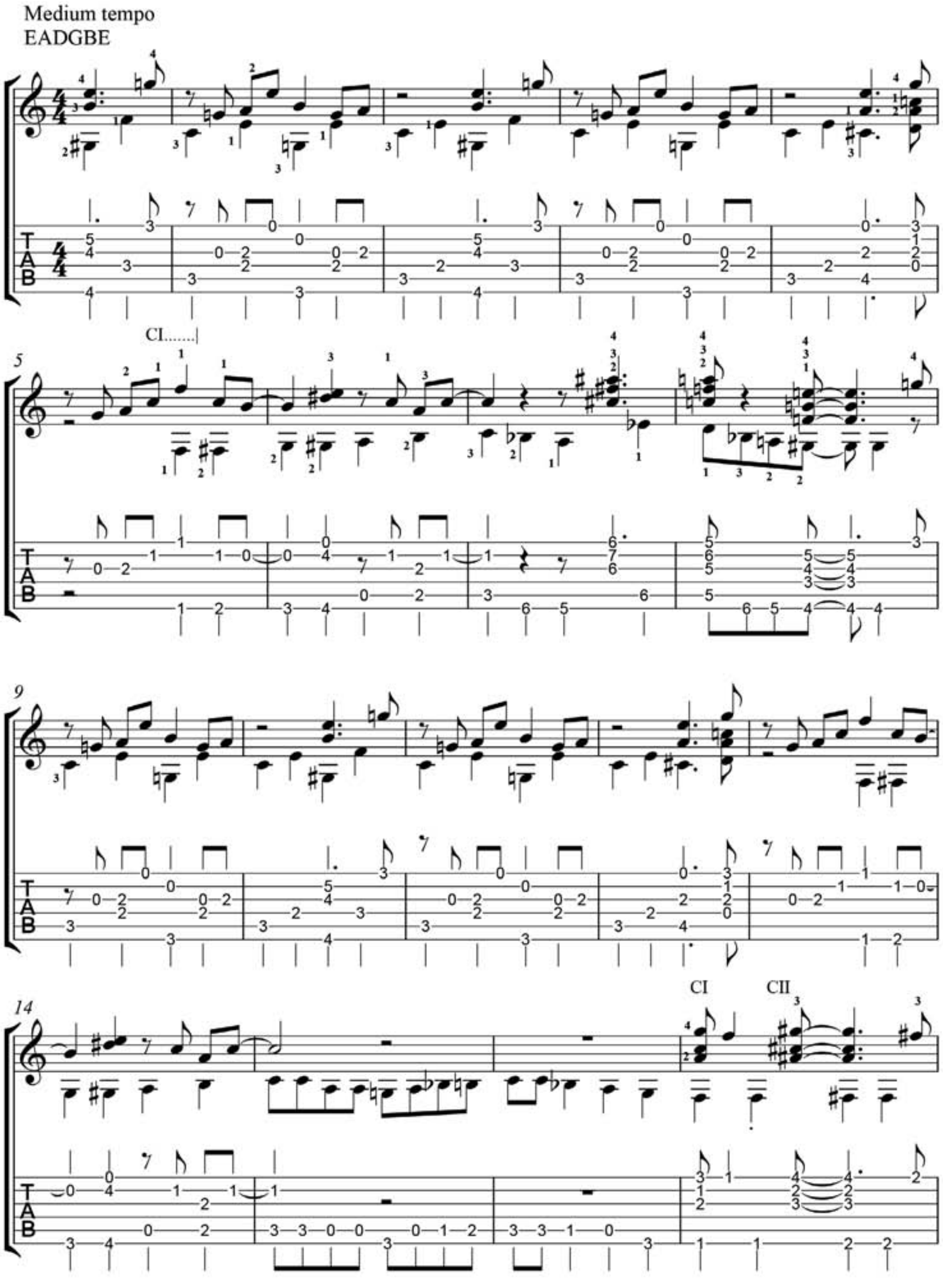
'Stompin' at the Savoy' was written in 1934 by Edgar Sampson and is named after the Savoy Ballroom, which, between 1926 and 1958, was located in Harlem, New York City. This jazz standard has been recorded countless times, with fantastic versions by some of the biggest names in the world of jazz, such as Art Tatum, Benny Goodman and Ella Fitzgerald, and Louis Armstrong. Guitar giants Charlie Christian, Joe Pass and Jim Hall have also recorded versions of it. Today, 'Stompin' at the Savoy' is a favourite at guitar festivals and guitar-led jam sessions in many parts of the globe.

This solo version is accessible to players from advanced-beginner onwards. It opens with the section-A melody arranged over an accompanying alternate thumb-picking groove. All bass notes in the score are pointing downward and fretting-hand fingerings have been included.

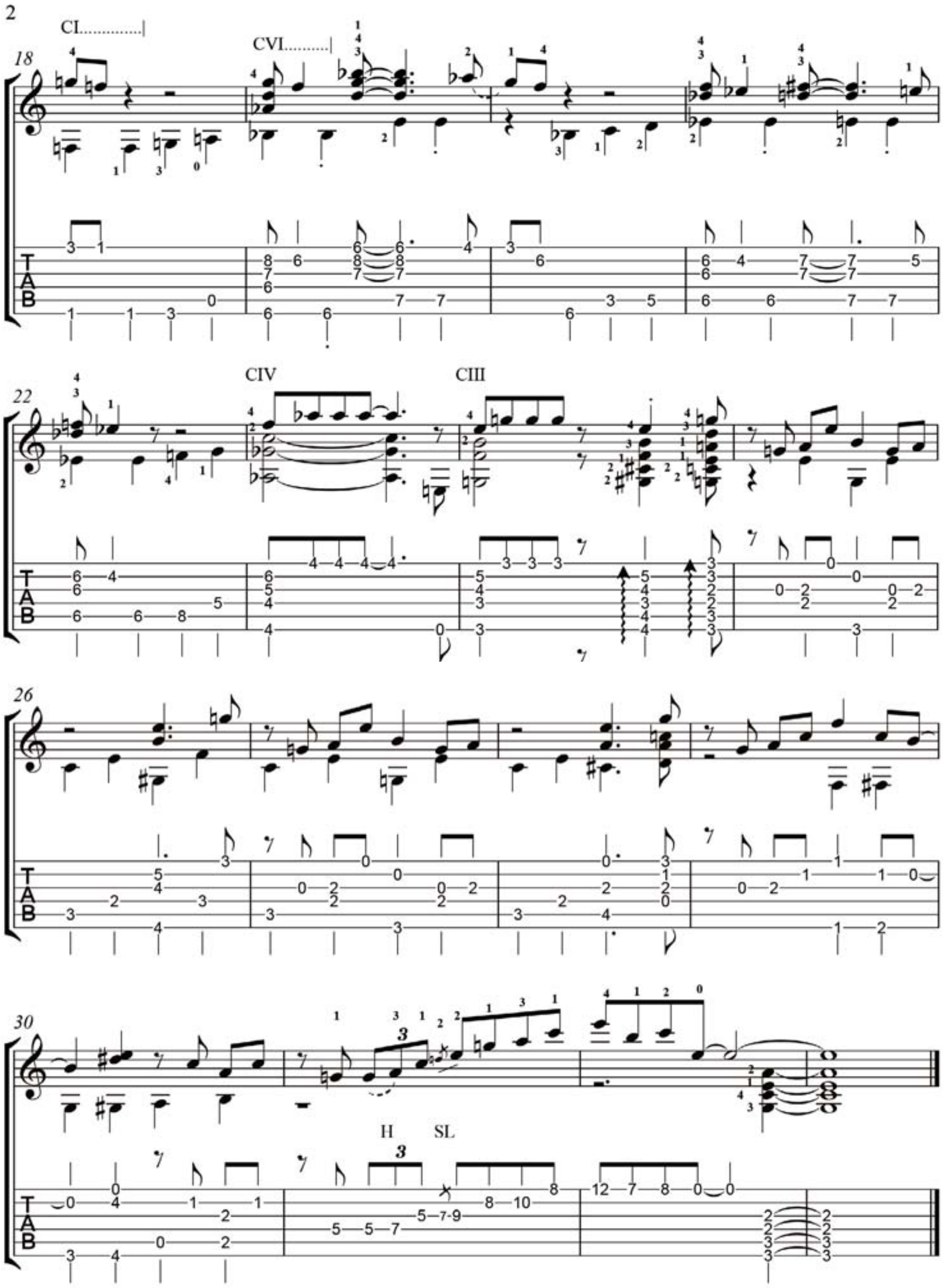
The lower part in bars five to eight has a walking-bass feel. Practise this on its own to familiarise yourself with the groove before adding the melody.

I have recorded slowed-down versions of bars one to four and five to eight to accompany this article – they can be heard at www.clivecarroll.co.uk/acoustic-magazine.html.

The B section begins at bar 17 with a barre at the first fret, which then shifts up a fret half way through the bar before returning to first position in bar 18. Bar 19 begins with a barre in sixth position. Again, keep an eye on the fret-hand fingerings in the slightly tricky phrase from bars 19-22.



"This jazz standard has been recorded countless times, with fantastic versions by some of the biggest names in the world of jazz, such as Art Tatum, Benny Goodman and Ella Fitzgerald, and Louis Armstrong."



The end of bar 24 features the chords of G13/Ab and C6/9. Note that the fret-hand second finger covers both the fifth and sixth strings. This may take a little experimentation with the position of the second finger to ensure clarity.

Bars 31-33 contain an ending which isn't included in the "jazz standard" version. It's a short riff of my own to conclude this arrangement, which I hope you'll enjoy.

Along with the audio clips to accompany bars one to four and five to eight, I've recorded an entire version of the arrangement, which can be heard on my website. ■

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LEON HUNT UK BANJO EXPERT

'CLINCH MOUNTAIN BACKSTEP'

Leon pays tribute to the late bluegrass pioneer Ralph Stanley

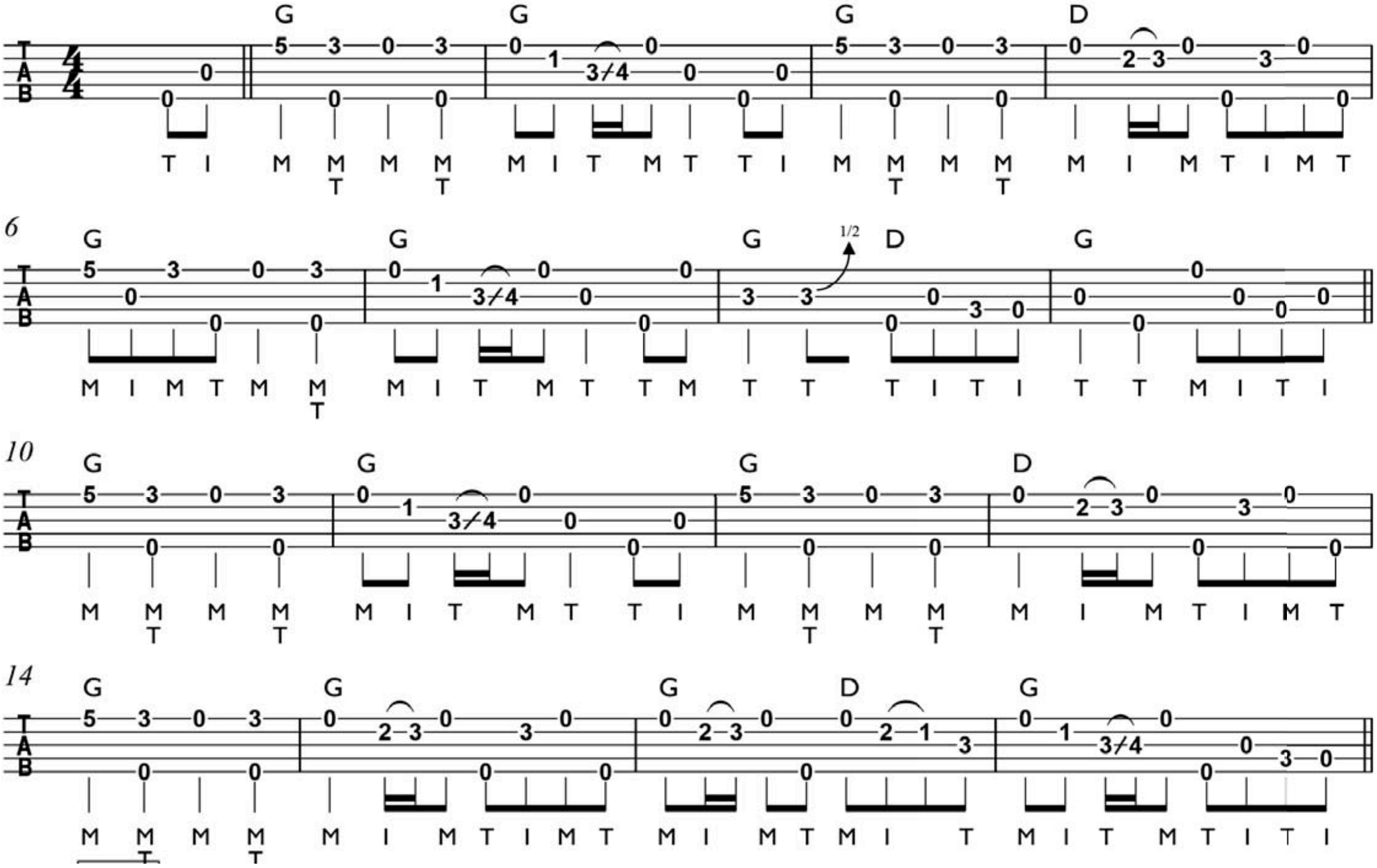
TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE

It's not only the world of mainstream entertainment that's been suffering seemingly unprecedented losses in recent times – the bluegrass community has been at it as well. Bluegrass' expanding list of 'late legends' is easier to explain, though. The simple fact that bluegrass music first came into being in the 1940s means that it's first generation of players must all have been born at least 85 years ago. As understandable as this is, it doesn't make writing a regular five-string banjo column that doesn't read like an obituary page any less of a challenge.

This month we'll be saying farewell to bluegrass pioneer and true master of the five-string banjo, Ralph Stanley, with one of his best-known banjo tunes, 'Clinch Mountain Backstep'.

Originally from McClure, a small town in southwest Virginia, Ralph Stanley and his older brother Carter began their playing careers performing as the Stanley Brothers. The duo soon went on to form their own backing band, The Clinch Mountain Boys in 1946. The Clinch Mountain Boys quickly became one of the most important names in bluegrass, until Carter's death in '66. The band carried on performing, albeit fairly sporadically in recent years, up until Ralph's death on 23 June.

'CLINCH MOUNTAIN BACKSTEP' – KEY OF G



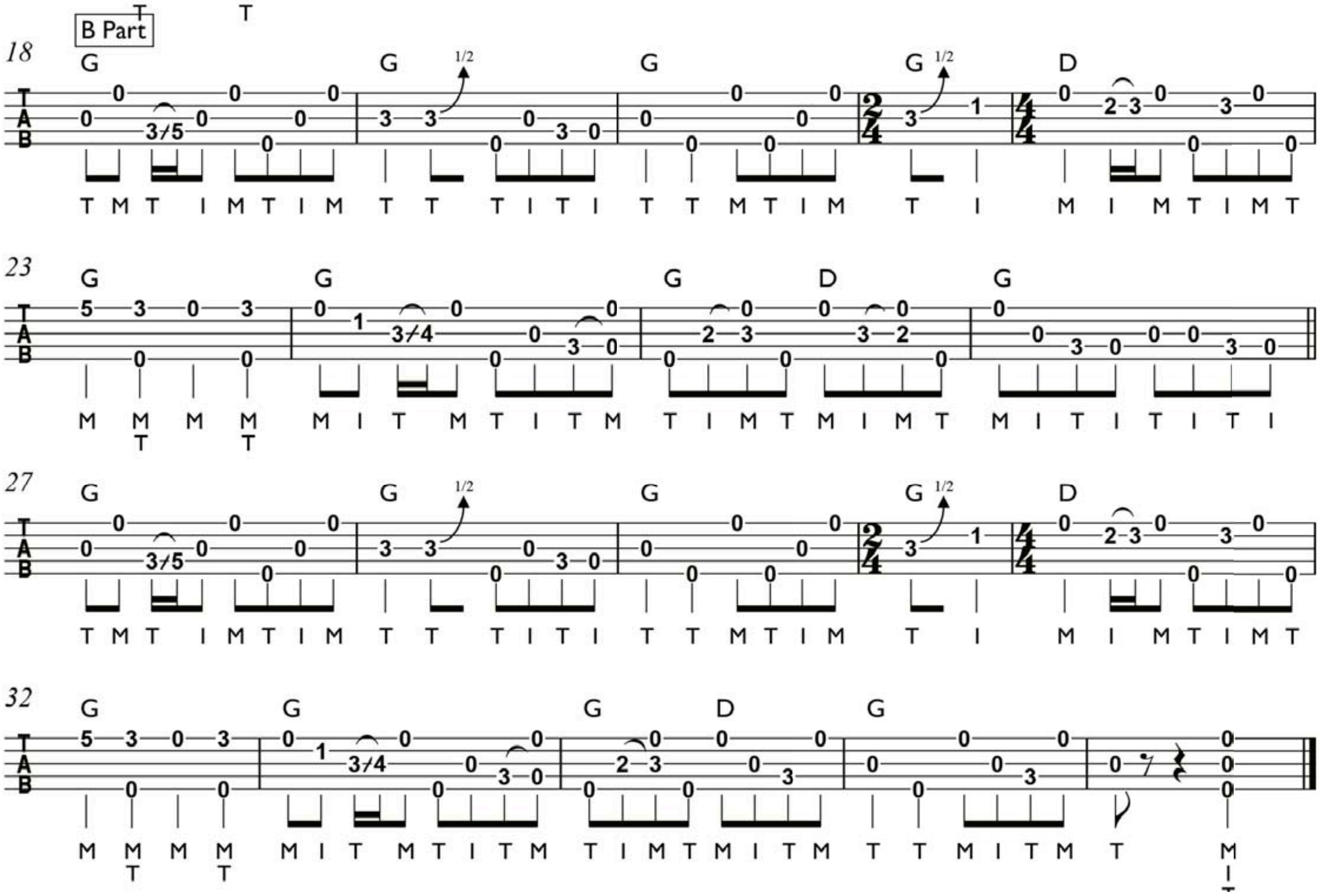
After spending more than six decades as one of the most celebrated banjo players in bluegrass music, Stanley was forced to hand over the Clinch Mountain Boys' banjo duties to the well-studied 'Stanley style' banjoist Mitchell Van Dyke. Not wanting to give up the limelight altogether, Stanley continued to front the band, concentrating on his (equally celebrated) singing. If you've ever seen the Coen Brothers film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* you'll have heard Stanley's deeply traditional vocal style on the cheery little number entitled 'Oh Death', which won him the 'Best Male Vocal Performance' Grammy in 2002.

Ralph Stanley's approach to the banjo gives us one of the most tangible links between bluegrass and American old-time playing you'll find anywhere. His characteristic hard, 'edgy' tone was largely due to his choice and set-up of (archtop) banjo, and the fact that he always picked the strings extremely close to the bridge. While this gave him all the dynamic range of an angle grinder, there was something primal and appealing about his style. Stanley's playing was also far less influenced by the jazz music that many of his contemporaries were beginning to incorporate into their styles. His sound often relied heavily on strong, relentless, and largely unbroken forward rolls, usually led by his index finger. By contrast, many other players at that time were beginning to mix various forward and backward rolls, usually punctuated by the thumb.

As well as being the obvious choice for a tribute of this kind, Ralph Stanley's best-known banjo tune, 'Clinch Mountain Backstep' also conveniently follows on from my last column where we discussed ways of putting more blues in bluegrass. This tune has a typically 'dark' Appalachian tonality to it, and once again leans heavily on the flattened 7ths (F) and what I would describe as 'ambiguous 3rds' (Bb – B), where neither the sound of the major or minor is allowed to fully develop and take hold of the tune. Any 3rds that do happen to crop up during the course of the melody seem to exist in a state of flux, moving between each other by sliding, pulling off or 'choking' the string. I've decided to push the boat out a little further than I did with my last tablature ('Bodum'), giving it an extra twisty feel which should help you further develop your musical vocabulary in this style of playing.

The 'Backstep' appears in the B section in the form of a couple of bars of 2/4. This might seem a bit odd at first but once you get a feel for it, really adds to the enjoyment of the tune. If you're looking for examples of 'Clinch Mountain Backstep', a YouTube search will throw up lots. The arrangement notated here is very close to the way I played it with the Scoville Units, also on YouTube (https://youtu.be/CzEstHgH9MI).

While this tablature is in G, the tune is more commonly played in A (just capo at the second fret). There is however some discussion about a couple of the early recordings that appear to be in G#. These versions were almost certainly played out of G with the instruments tuned a semitone high, a fairly common practice by many of the early bluegrass and string bands. ■



CHRIS WOODS CONTEMPORARY ACOUSTIC GROOVE PLAYER

'AMYGDALA PART I'

Chris shows us how to build a melody from just two simple chords

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

I'm a great believer in making things simple, especially when it comes to being creative. I'm not arguing against hard work but let's face it; when creating something, the smoother the ride the more likely you are to keep going. So, in this article I'm going to be helping you to create a melody using two chord shapes. Crucially, those two chord shapes require very little movement.

It's something I've touched on before but this month I'm going to be using my track 'Amygdala Part I' as the stimulus. As always this is accessible to all; we build in complexity as we go.

Essentially there are three exercises here: firstly the chords, then the main melody as single notes, which can be found within the chords. Finally there is the advanced part, which pulls together the melody, chords and a rhythmic arpeggio. This advanced part is what is played in the actual recording, which you can listen to on YouTube for free, or in the digital edition of this mag. It's always good to be able to play along.

The purpose of these exercises is to try and break down how the melody is constructed to give you some fresh perspective on creating your own melodies. Of course if you learn the advanced part you will also be able to play the main theme from 'Amygdala Part I', happy days!

Throughout the exercises we are referring to the main theme from the piece, which features at various points throughout the track, but is most clearly played in the opening minute. Please note this track was recorded with the E string dropped down to B, and with a capo across all six strings on the first fret.

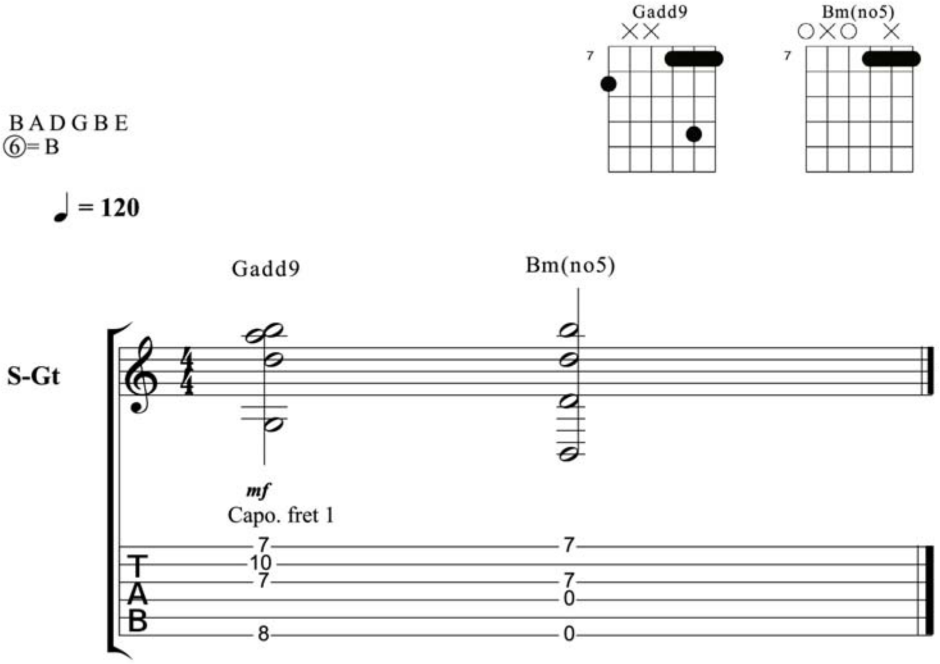
The Chords: The main theme uses two chords, both notated here for you. Get stuck into exploring both chords. Notice how your first finger remains barred on the seventh fret, so even though they might require a bit of a stretch there isn't much movement. This keeps things nice and simple.

The Melody: These notes are taken from the chords, until bar 11/12 where we add in our third finger to briefly play the ninth fret. Notice how much melody can be picked out from a chord – the notes for your melodies are almost always already at your fingertips!

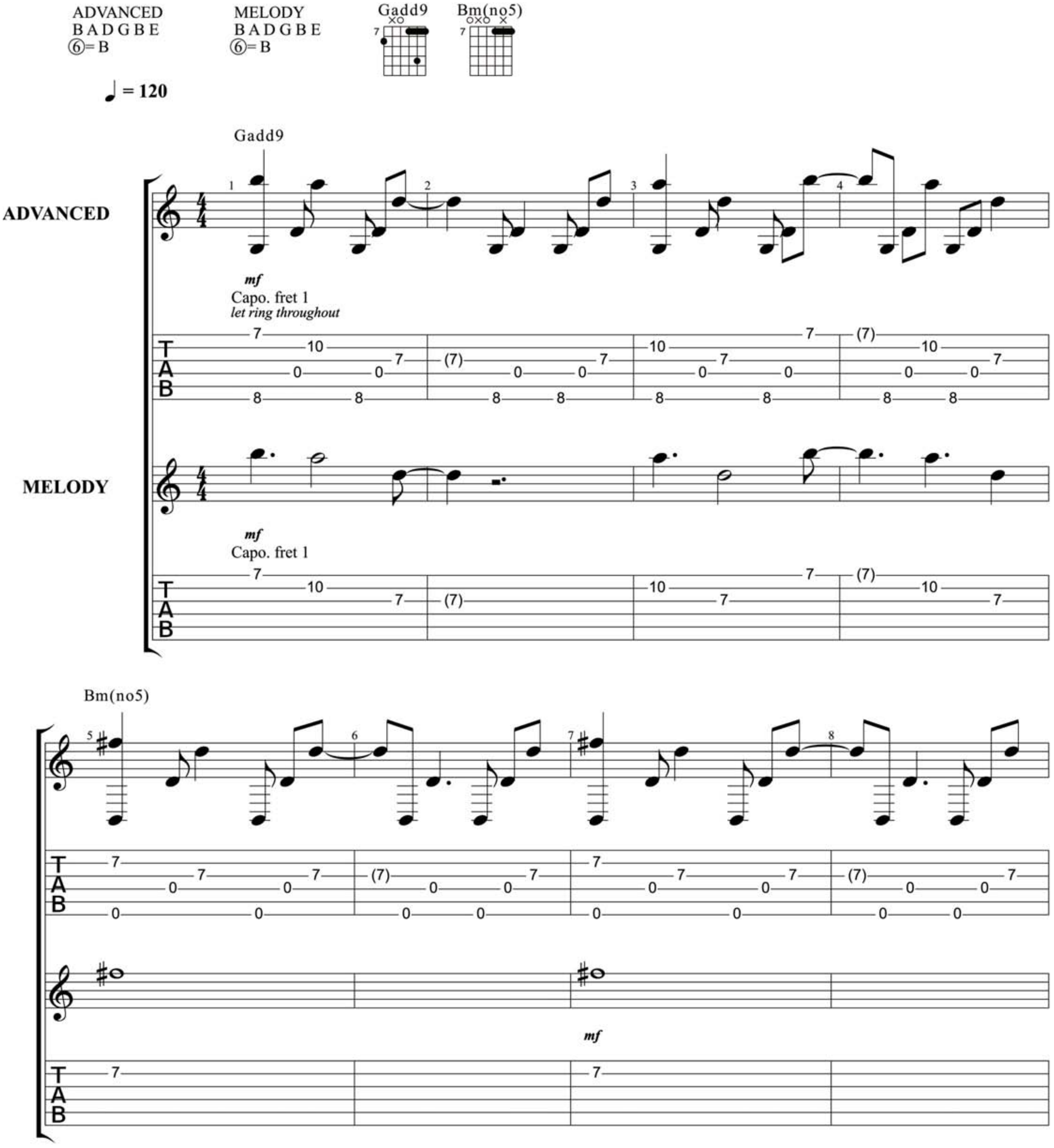
Advanced Part: The melody notes and chords are still here, we just have a rhythmic arpeggio pattern that morphs around the melody notes to create a sense of rhythm and of course to add some texture. To master this it's worth analysing the tab to see where the arpeggio notes fall, and for you to try to identify any patterns.

I hope you enjoy these exercises, and of course the track. As always remember to take things slow and keep an open mind. There are so many different lessons you could take from this process, so whatever it is you find I hope it helps you to create your own music. ■

CHORDS



ADVANCED/MELODY



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MATT STEVENS INSTRUMENTAL COMPOSER

IN THE LOOP

Matt gets us adding percussive 'drum' loops to our performances

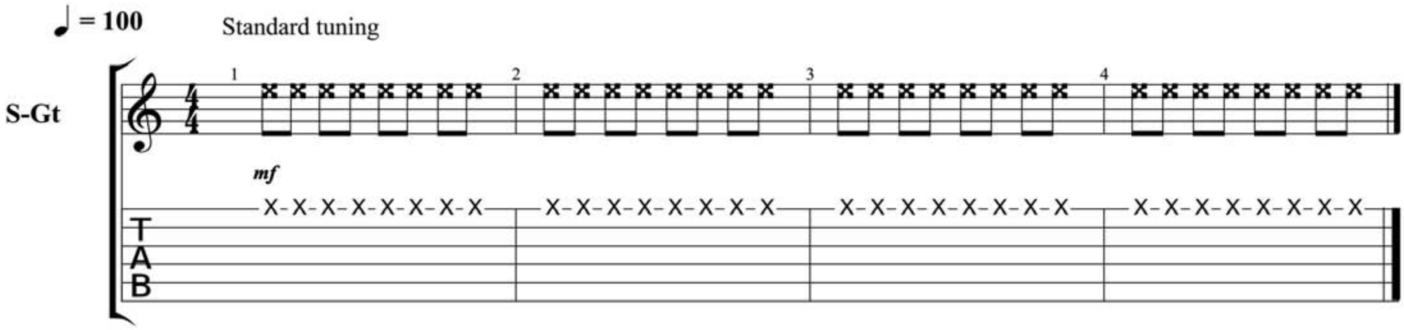
TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

Many modern pop songs are built around drum breaks with a simple four-bar drum loop capable of being the hook for a hit single. Some classic drum loops are the basis for many songs and even entire genres. For example the 'amen break' is a four-bar loop about six seconds long that has been sampled thousands of times. This short part of an obscure soul tune has become the basis for many drum'n'bass and hip hop tunes and even the occasional acoustic one. Look it up on Youtube and you'll soon recognise it.

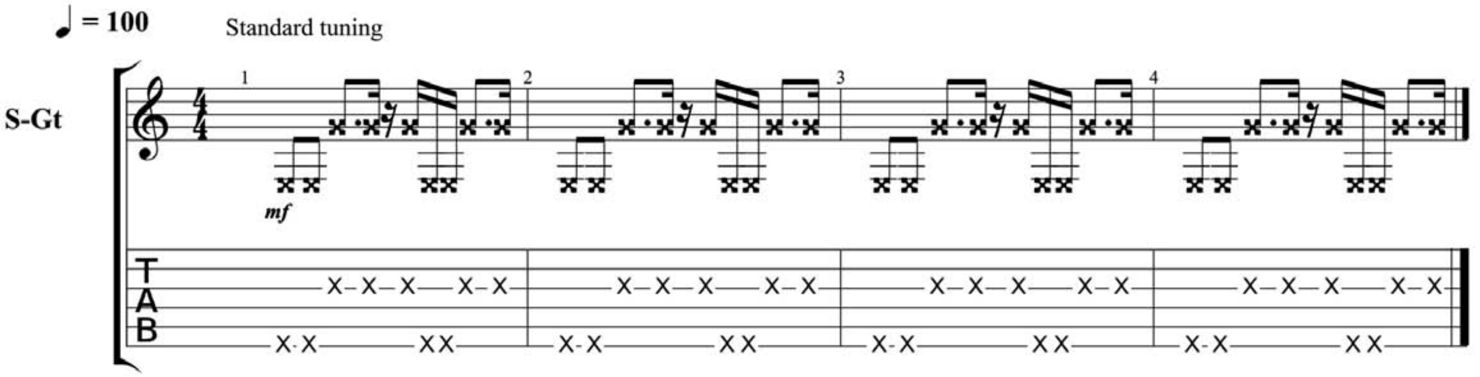
One of the great things about using live looping is that we don't need to sample, we can build up a rhythmic loop from scratch using just our acoustic guitar and a loop pedal. We can take inspiration from classic breaks to develop our own original sounds. The acoustic guitar is a great instrument to sample and there are many useful and less obvious sounds we can get from hitting the guitar in unusual places or using different techniques. In this lesson we're going to dampen the strings with our left hand to play them percussively (left-handed players should use the right hand). We hold our left hand over the strings to stop the note resonating to create a percussive sound while not actually pushing down hard enough to produce a note, just a dampened scratchy sound. By hitting different strings we can get slightly different sounds.

In **example 1** we're going to put down a fake hi-hat part by hitting the high E

EXAMPLE 1



EXAMPLE 2



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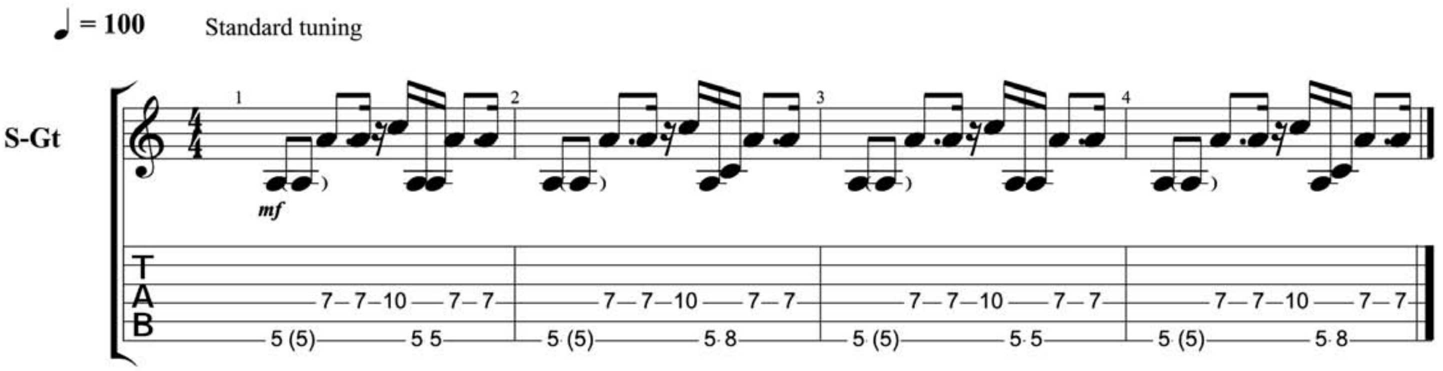
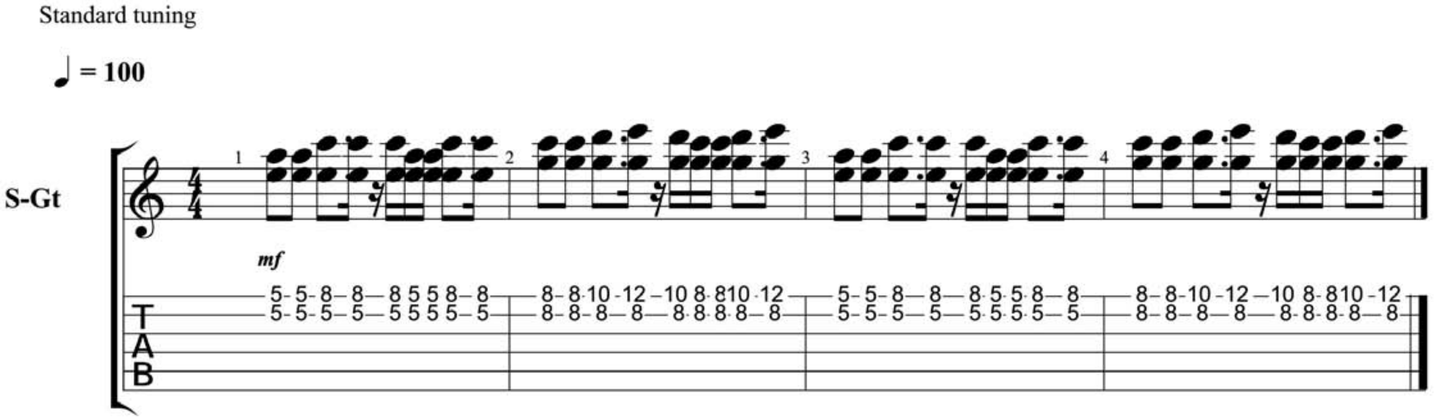


EXAMPLE 4



string dampened with our left hand in eighth notes. This part will be the basis of our entire loop, so we must ensure that it's perfectly in time. This can be harder than it looks, and the best way to get your rhythms really tight is to practise along to a metronome until it's perfect. Hit loop record on your pedal and record in **example 1**. Sometimes it can be hard to co-ordinate your feet when hitting the buttons on your initial loop but this does get a lot easier with practice, it just takes a bit of time. If you have problems, try tapping your feet along to a metronome to improve your rhythmic skills or even take up playing the drums. It all helps.

Once **example 1** is looping around, you can hit record/overdub on your loop pedal and add **example 2**. This is your fake drum part to go along with your hi-hat. The dampened open low E represents the kick drum and the dampened open G represents the snare. This groove is quite funky and may take a while to get perfectly in time, but it's easy once you get the feel. When you are comfortable with this you can add more percussion parts by hitting the body of the guitar. Experiment with hitting the guitar in different places to get more sounds, and if you want to you can leave loop/overdub switched on and add these to your loop.

Example 3 is our bass-line, which you can record over your drum loop. Once again, try and really feel the groove and get this locked in. If you are performing the loop in front of an audience, you may want to try a few variations on the bass-line before you hit the record button to keep people interested. You can also try using an octave pedal set to an octave down on your acoustic guitar to really thicken up the bass.

Example 4 is our final layer, a guitar part played on the top two strings. It's a simple melodic hook that you can bring in and out over the loop you have already created. Perhaps in performance you could use the erase button (if your loop pedal has it) to erase, then bring back in this layer as part of the overall arrangement for your song. As a loop-based performer, the arrangement is key to keeping the interest of a crowd, so try lots of variations by dropping in and out your loops until you have something that excites you and that will translate to others.

A simple drum loop can inspire great songs. If you listen to many modern hip-hop/pop crossover records they are based around one great drum groove alongside parts such as a bass-line and few chords that drop in and out under the melody. It's all about the groove and the hooks. Even the Beatles made good use of a repetitive drum groove and a great bass-line with the song 'Tomorrow Never Knows'. It takes time to get these parts perfectly in time to create a great live looped groove, but it's really worth it. ■

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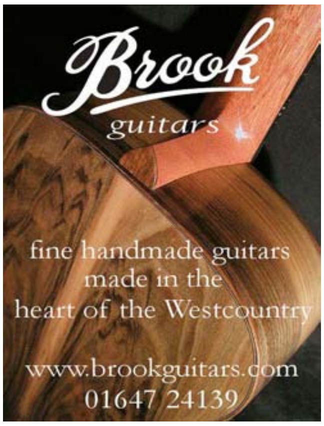

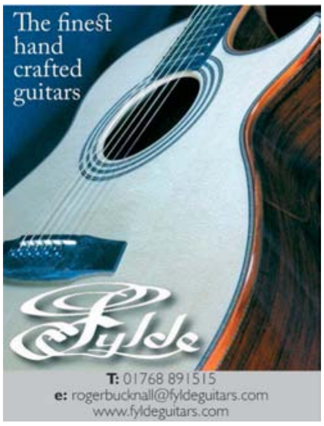

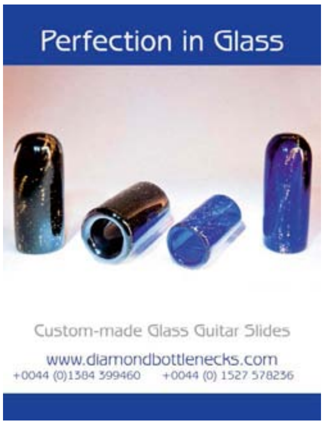

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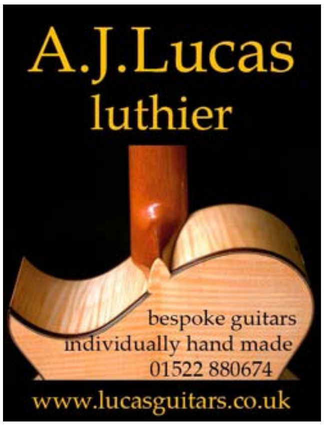

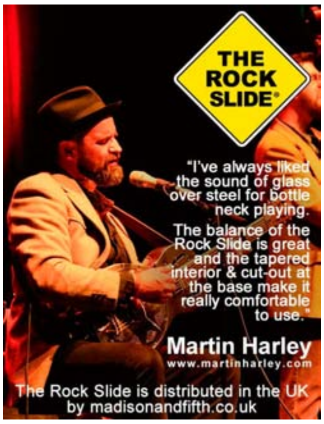

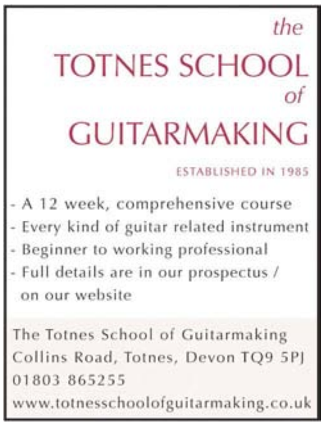

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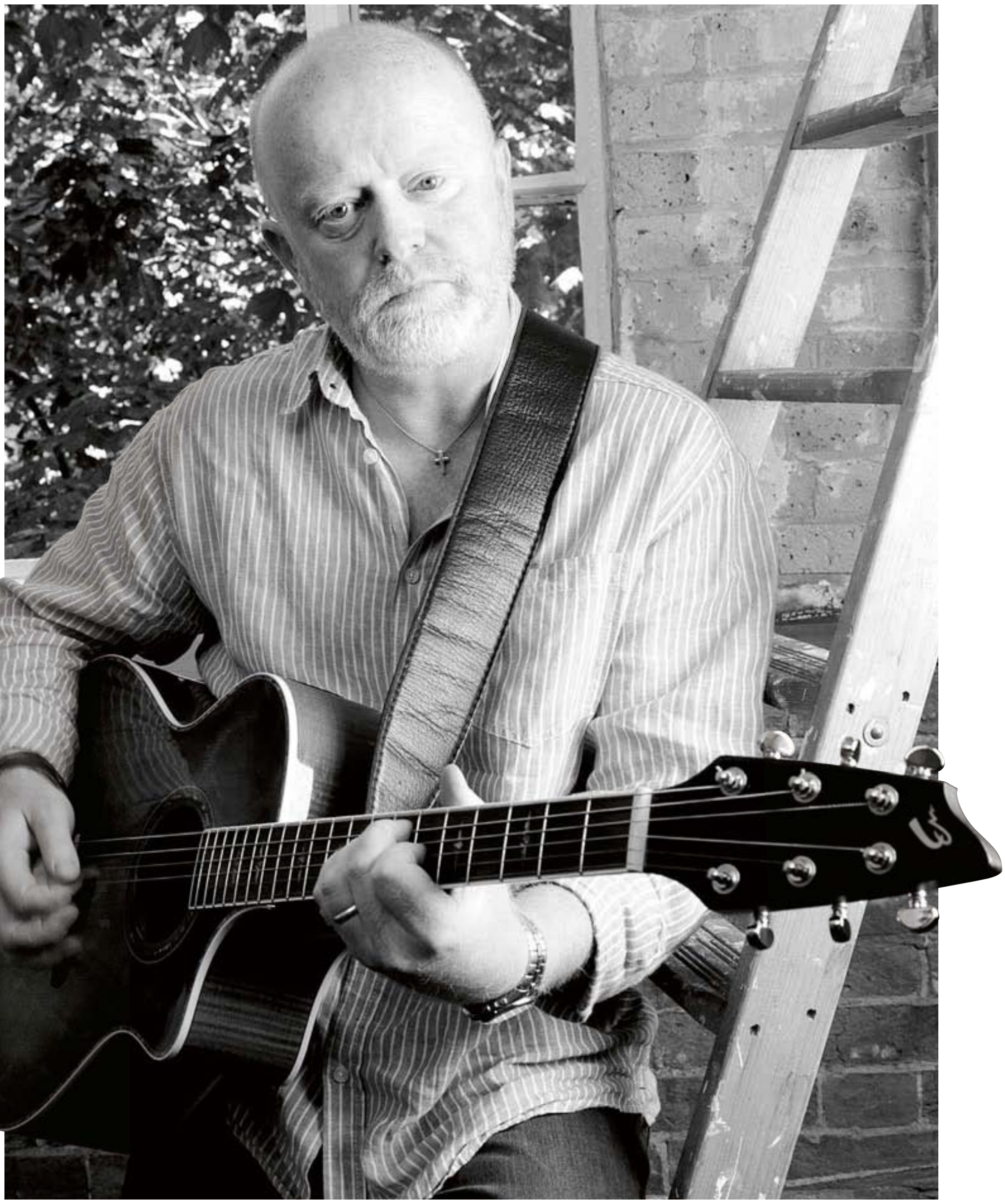
A FUNNY NOTE

A reminder of those dark times when guitarists couldn't use a piece of technology to get tuned up, but instead had to rely on their lugholes

Since time began historians have always found it helpful to split up the past by referring to time as pre or post significant events of relevance to their particular bent. So they might refer to something as before Caxton's printing press or after Stephenson's Rocket, let's say. Indeed time itself is lumped into two categories by the Gregorian calendar: BC or AD.

However, should you stumble into the murky world of the guitarist you would find that history is, on occasion, defined BT or AT – before tuners or after tuners…

Back in the 70s it was only the very cream of performers who could afford for their guitar tech to use a machine, roughly the size of a tumble dryer, to tune their instruments. The rest of us had to make do with nasty little plastic panpipes or even a tuning fork. The norm would be to get an E from the keyboard player, if you had one, and do it by ear… you know, the big, flappy things that hold your glasses on. Nowadays your floor tuning pedal will mute the sound while you fine-tune your G string, but in those days, or should I say BT, once things began to get sonically challenging you'd have to wait till the end of the song to track down the offender. With no mute on offer it gave birth to a raft of terrible one-liners as embarrassed front men struggled to maintain their cool aura. "Our next tune is an old Chinese folk song called tune–in…" Should it be in some hot, sweaty dive or alternatively a freezing cold tent, the old Chinese folk song might well be played every other song.



I remember in the early 70s being in a band that featured two of us on 12-string guitars. Well keeping those bad boys in tune under the lights was interesting to say the least, suffice to say after the first couple of songs it would all start to get very twangy and we'd flash dirty looks at each other in the hope that the audience would think the other was to blame. In addition we had a keyboard player who insisted on playing a proper acoustic piano. This led to many a wobbly bottom lip moment as most venues' pianos were at best honky tonk and at worst unplayable. In an effort to overcome such hurdles we'd even provide the contact details for a local piano tuner and get the promoter to sign to the effect that a tuned piano would be provided… naive or what?

Turning up at one particular gig in Thetford we walked on the stage to find no piano at all… On enquiring as to its whereabouts, we were told it was in the church hall down the road. So ensued the unlikely scene of four young musos pushing a piano through Thetford's pedestrian precinct, cobbles and all, on a freezing December Saturday afternoon. Of course by the time we'd got it up on the stage it was completely out, so asking for an E from our now sobbing keyboard player was of no great assistance.

But these days… well these days I seem to have more tuners than I can shake a stick at. One that clips on the headstock, one built into the guitar preamp, two floor tuners (one on my effects board), one on my phone, on my iPod… they're everywhere. In fact, now you can even buy guitars that tune themselves!

Of course when you're sitting playing in your bedroom or wherever, the old ears are fine, but live with a band they don't half make life easier. Mind you, I did on one occasion get caught out when tuning down to dropped D while introducing the next song. Patting myself on the back for such outrageous multitasking, and having got the necessary paired green lights I had unfortunately failed to notice the # symbol. Time then slowed down and I found myself back in 1974… "So that was an old Chinese Folk song called…" The old ones are the best! ■

Artist: Louise Day

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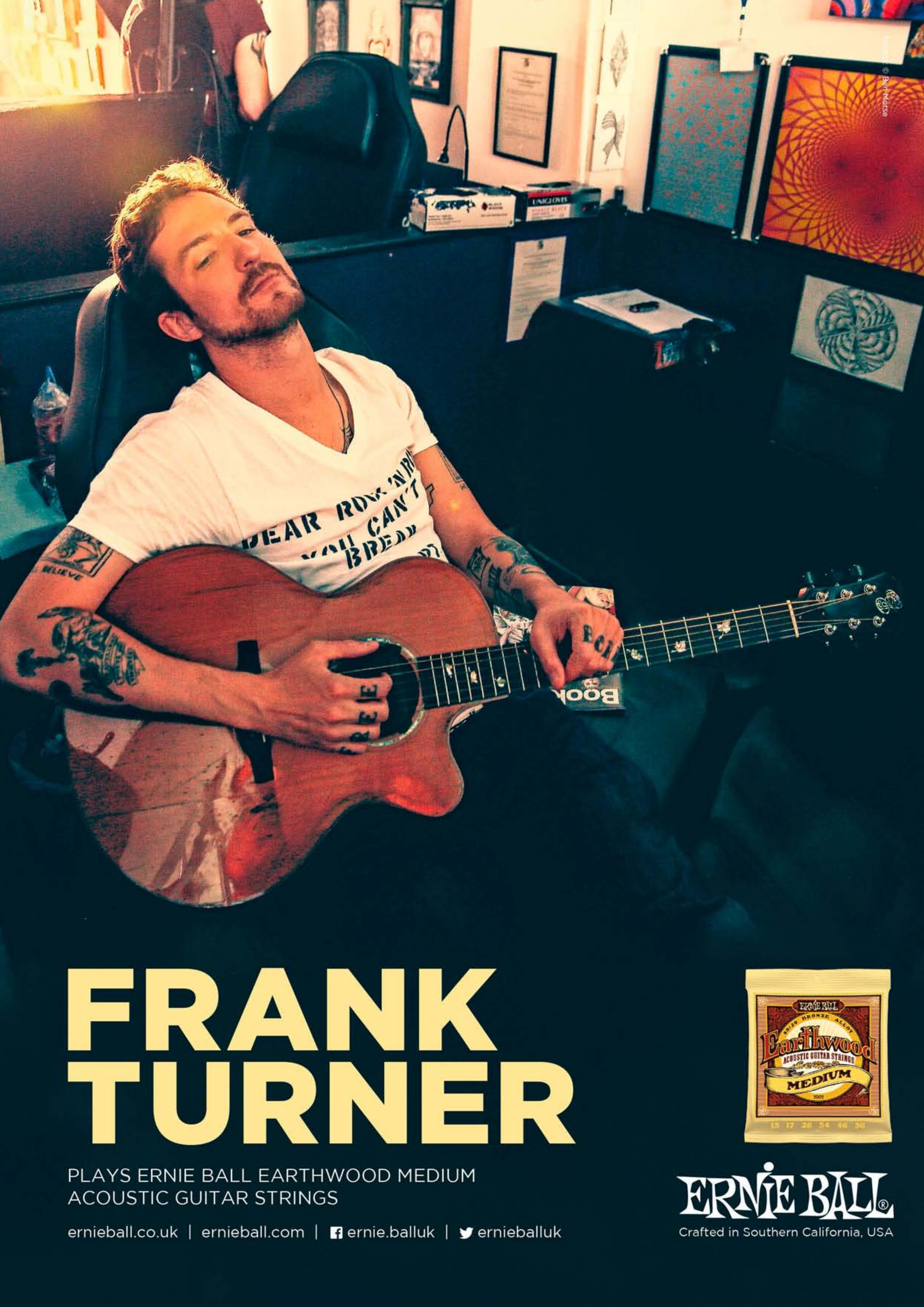

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